



## School May Start Later Next Year Due To High Fuel Prices

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BILOXI (WLOX) -- "The game is over, because the bishop and queen are working well," an award-winning chess player explained to a group of superintendents Tuesday morning.

Mississippi school leaders learned how the game of chess can help students overcome obstacles and win in life. The superintendents also learned how to make all the right moves, when it comes to cutting costs.

"Now with the fuel costs, it has created a serious concern across the state," said Dr. Sam Bounds, Executive Director of the Mississippi Association of School Superintendents. About 138 members, along with the Alliance of Educational Leaders of Mississippi, are meeting this week at Beau Rivage in Biloxi.

"Just with fuel for the buses, districts have ranged any where from \$20,000 more to \$1.7 million more this last school year," said Bounds.

"Last year, we budgeted \$165,000 for diesel fuel. This year we have had to budget \$250,000 for diesel fuel," said Pearl River County Superintendent Dennis Penton.

"We've got to take a real hard look at our bus routes for next year to see if there's any way to see if we can cut some of them out or reroute them, because it's going to be a major, major issue for us next year," said Pass Christian School Superintendent Dr. Sue Matheson.

With more strains on their budgets and no relief in sight at the pumps, some school districts may have to sacrifice other programs or even personnel.

"Things that are potential changes could be cutting out field trips next year, possibly shortening some travel plans on athletic programs. All of those things are potential cost savings," said Penton.

School superintendents are also worried about having to pay more for electricity. One proposal they're studying is pushing back the opening of school next year.

"August is one of our hottest months and if we could prolong starting school until maybe

the last week in August or the first in September, it would definitely help us," said Matheson.

Another idea is to change to a four-day workweek. Superintendents must come up with a good strategy to keep their districts financially afloat.

"Anything that would help stretch the dollar, so we can continue to focus on the education of the individual child," said Bounds.

School districts can decide for themselves if they want to move back the first day of school. But other actions, like changing to a four-day work week, require approval from the state Department of Education, state lawmakers, and the governor.

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