

Dakota, Romeo high schools to get increased police presence



Dakota High School in Macomb Township and its feeder schools will be getting a second liaison officer. MACOMB DAILY FILE PHOTO

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Macomb County Sheriff Anthony Wickersham speaks at a press conference in 2017. MACOMB DAILY FILE PHOTO

Dakota High School and its feeder schools in Macomb Township will have a second sheriff's deputy to help ensure safety on the grounds starting in September.

The county Board of Commissioners last week gave final approval to the deal to add the second officer upon request from the township and Chippewa Valley Schools.

The board also approved locating a deputy at Romeo High School in Washington Township after the [Romeo Board of Education approved it in June](#).

Sheriff Anthony Wickersham said requests from the schools came in the aftermath of a rash of threats of violence in Macomb County and throughout the nation since last February's mass school shooting in Parkland, Fla.

"It's good to have more deputies in the schools with what has been going on across the country," Wickersham said. In June, he said, "I do believe it's a value and something we need in today's environment. It definitely is a deterrent."

Chippewa Valley Superintendent Ron Roberts wrote June 14 to sheriff's Lt. Steven Briney: "School safety is our number one priority and it is our belief that the addition of this officer would enhance the safety of our students and staff."

Dakota, like many high schools, already has had a school liaison officer in its building. But Wickersham noted that Dakota is the largest high school in the state, with two large middle schools feeding it.

"The middle schools generate a lot of activity, too," Wickersham said.

The second deputy will allow one deputy to remain at the high school full-time while the second can bounce between all the schools -- high, middle and elementary.

Having an officer in school allows him or her to develop a rapport with the students, which can help thwart incidents and improve investigation of incidents.

More than 60 school threats were reported at schools in Macomb County in the weeks and months following the Florida shooting. About one-fourth of those who made threats were charged as adults because they were 17 or older.

A Clinton Township police officer already is deployed at Chippewa Valley High School.

In both instances, Romeo and Chippewa Valley will split the cost with the townships to pay for the deputies' annual cost of \$118,161 in salary and benefits.

"This is pretty darn cheap to have a resource like this and have a positive impact on the community," Washington Township Supervisor Dan O'Leary said at the May meeting of the township Board of Trustees. "I think it is a win for everybody."

"It is about having a presence and building trust with students and police among other things," Wickersham told Romeo school officials in June.

Romeo High School last had a deputy in its building in the mid-2000s.

Though Romeo High School won't be moving in to a new facility at 29 Mile and Jewel roads in Washington Township until September 2019, the officer will work at the existing facility on 32 Mile Road in Romeo this school year. The deputy, who will be stationed at the Washington Township Fire Station on 27 Mile Road, will visit all of the schools.

"It's important to give the program time to get off the ground and to start getting kids acclimated to seeing them," O'Leary said Monday. "The whole point is building a positive relationship and there's no sense in waiting on that for the school to be done."

The new high school will be connected to and larger than the Romeo Engineering Technology Center and house students in grades 10 through 12. Ninth-graders will move into the current Powell Middle School on the same campus as the new high school, and students from the two middle schools will move into the existing high school building.