

# Chippewa Valley evaluates traffic safety at schools



In the wake of the traffic-related death of a Dakota High School student, a Transportation Improvement Association traffic study was launched. It is expected to be completed by late February or early March. Nicole Tuttle — For the Macomb Daily

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Chippewa Valley Schools is currently evaluating potential road safety measures in the area of Chippewa Valley High School in Clinton Township. Nicole Tuttle — For the Macomb Daily

The Chippewa Valley School District is reevaluating its approach to school and traffic safety in the wake of the death of a Dakota student.

Chippewa Valley Schools Superintendent Ron Roberts said the district felt it needed to do something to take greater action on the issue after sophomore Victoria Cartwright, 14, was struck and killed while walking to school Nov. 4. “With 21 and Heydenreich it was a little different. Concerns were raised over the loss of a student in November, of Torey Cartwright,” Roberts said.

Cartwright was hit by a Jeep Wrangler driven by a 16-year-old girl on Heydenreich Road near Vine Drive in Macomb Township. The Jeep driver and her 16-year-old female passenger were on their way to Dakota High School at the time, as was Cartwright.

Since then, Cartwright's mother, Amber Markel, and several Macomb Township residents have lobbied before the Macomb Township Board of Trustees to consider better lighting in the area and make other roadway improvements. The board approved street lights for the area near Dakota on Jan. 11 and roadway experts indicated the speed limit could be reduced during school release and entrance hours.

The Transportation Improvement Association will complete a traffic study requested by Chippewa Valley Schools, a study which began in January and is expected to take two months to complete.

"Yes, it is moving along. We expect it at the end of the month or the start of March," Roberts said.

The district is in the process of developing a plan encompassing the north end of the district to increase student safety entering and leaving schools, Roberts said. In the 21 Mile and Heydenreich roads area in Macomb Township, the district has several other schools in addition to Dakota.

"Right now we are in the process of setting up a meeting with the Traffic Improvement Association to review ideas they have for education of our students and community. That is in place right now," Roberts said.

Dakota High School also has a crossing guard at Heydenreich and Cougar Drive, Roberts added.

Dakota and other schools in Macomb Township are not the only ones the district is considering improved traffic safety for. School and Community Relations Director Diane Blain said that on Feb. 6 during a Chippewa Valley Schools Board of Education meeting, Roberts discussed traffic safety at Chippewa Valley High School as well as Dakota.

"Then we're also talking about around Chippewa Valley High School. It has been brought to our attention that there are things we should consider to make getting to and leaving school safer for our students there," Roberts said.

According to an online school newsletter from Chippewa Valley High School, Cartwright's death has played a role in encouraging the Clinton Township school to examine its traffic safety measures. Chippewa Valley High School Assistant Principal John Briningstool wrote a letter encouraging safety awareness for the front page of the newsletter.

"This school year, the Chippewa Valley School district was shaken by the tragic death of a Dakota student who was struck by a car on her way to school. Every school leader's greatest concern centers on student safety and ensuring that students arrive and get home from school safely," Briningstool wrote. "Parents of the Chippewa Valley High School community have expressed concerns about the traffic on 19 Mile Road around our school campus at both student arrival and dismissal times."

Concerns have included student jaywalking, crossing roundabouts at Romeo Plank Road, or students wearing dark clothing that makes it difficult for drivers to see them, according to the newsletter. Briningstool also wrote that district and school leadership held a meeting to discuss the challenges as well as solutions. He further encouraged students and families to have greater awareness of pedestrians on 19 Mile Road, as well as roundabouts on Romeo Plank and Greenfield roads. Students are encouraged to use cross walks and the school is studying potential safety measures, Briningstool added.

Educating parents and students on employing good habits is key, according to Roberts

“We really have to impress upon students and parents that the procedures are in place to protect their safety. We really need to get our kids to cross the streets at safety points. Some kids are in a hurry and that does not always happen...I think anytime we talk to students and reinforce what is right, there’s a greater chance they’ll do that,” Roberts said.