

Chippewa Valley to host town hall forums on school safety

School security, bond subject of forums

- By Don Gardner, dgardner@digitalfirstmedia.com and @skeeoos on Twitter

Don Gardner

@skeeoos on Twitter



On Aug. 13, the Chippewa Valley Schools Board of Education approved a resolution establishing Nov. 6 for a bond election. If approved by voters, the proposal would fund security enhancements at buildings such as Dakota High School.

Nicole Tuttle — For The Macomb Daily



Ron Roberts, Photo courtesy of CHIPPEWA VALLEY SCHOOLS

The Chippewa Valley Schools district has scheduled two town hall meetings for the next two weeks to discuss elements of a bond proposal that would largely improve school security.

The \$97 million bond proposal will go before voters on the November ballot.

The two town hall meetings are scheduled for Wednesday, Aug. 22 at 7 p.m. in the Dakota High School auditorium, and Wednesday, Aug. 29 in the Chippewa Valley High School auditorium.

Town hall speakers for both dates include:

- Ron Roberts, Chippewa Valley Schools superintendent.
- Brian Smilnak, security consultant and architect for Wakely Associates Inc.
- Beth Pyden, Chippewa Valley Schools school board president.
- Anthony Wickersham, Macomb County Sheriff.

The presentation is designed to discuss school safety, according to district officials. A full bond presentation will be scheduled for another date.

Roberts said the district school buildings already have electronic access, secure front access and security cameras in place, but the camera systems are more than 10 years old, and with improved technology available, updates are needed.

The bond would also address a need for more secure vestibules in the school buildings, including additional physical barriers. Currently, front entrances to school buildings have a desk and a security person, but no physical barrier. When possible, a second set of interior doors will also be added to other school doors as well. Roberts said the district also plans to create barriers within buildings that close and contain movement that would be used in the event of an emergency. The physical barriers would work in conjunction with surveillance and access control.

"We think these and other things we hope to put in place will help us obtain our goal of making our schools safer," Roberts said.

The district held a tele-town hall in June, and an instant poll was taken on the call. Results of the poll indicated school safety should be a top priority, and in terms of security enhancements, "more outside entry barriers" was the top response.

Roberts admitted school administrators are aware there is a fine line between the need to keep students and staff safe and concerns the building doesn't end up with the feel of a jail or a prison.

"That is something we always try to balance," Roberts said. "It does need to be welcoming to students. For the most part, these are things that the students won't notice. But students must be in an environment that is conducive to learning. There is a line between feeling safe and feeling like an institution that is not a school."

Roberts also said metal detectors are not part of the current plan. He said the amount of detectors and staff needed to move students through each school on a daily basis rule out such a plan.

The district also plans to reconfigure the main drive, Cougar Drive, out of Dakota High School off of Heydenreich Road. With a population of about 3,000 students, many driving their own cars to school, school traffic often backs up in the morning as students try to enter the school parking lot. The reconfiguration would create a third entry lane.

Other plans on the proposed bond include replacing older buses and repair or replace aging roofs, plumbing and mechanical systems and other infrastructure. And state-of-the art instructional technology and increased access to Career and Technical Education program is also included.

"The community has been very supportive of all of this in concept, and it's really important that it gets all of the correct information," Roberts said.

For more information about the town halls or the rest of the proposed bond, call 586-723-2240.