

# Dakota High to host 'The Outsiders'

C AND G NEWSPAPERS

By Thomas Franz✉



Pictured is Dakota High School's cast of "The Outsiders." (Photo provided by Kelly Schmidt)

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MACOMB TOWNSHIP — For middle school students in Chippewa Valley Schools, "The Outsiders" is required reading before heading off to high school.

When it was announced that "The Outsiders" would be Dakota High School's theatre group's spring production, that familiarity sparked tremendous excitement.

"The students were so thrilled about the show. They were jumping up and down and talking about it in the halls," said musical director Kelly Schmidt. "The students knew the show really well before they auditioned, so you could tell during the audition process that they students did their research."

The announcement of "The Outsiders" came during a rehearsal for the group's winter show of "In the Heights," and they had to quickly get to work on preparing for the spring show, which debuts April 19.

Junior Jacob Czopek, who will play Ponyboy in "The Outsiders," said the group's previous familiarity with the show has helped prepare everyone in a time crunch when they'll have had about 15 rehearsals over six weeks, compared to about five months of preparation for "In the Heights."

"We just kind of learned on the spot, and it's slowly but surely developed as we've gone along," Czopek said. "A lot of people in the school know the show, and since a lot of people knew it, a lot of people came to audition who were just new. That was really cool having read the book and seen the movie."

Czopek's character is the show's narrator who describes the many relationships involved in the plot, which features a pair of teenage gangs, the "Greasers" and "Socs."

"I'm more used to playing the comedic role. This is my first drama, and it has a different feel with a lot more internal dialogue. It's a lot more complicated," Czopek said. "It's a good challenge. I like it."

Senior student director Angelina Kanan said the group's familiarity with stage combat and gang mentality from its performance of "West Side Story" in 2015 has helped show preparation.

"We kind of knew what's going on, but it's different because we knew these characters already. To see that come together and to be able to put together the story that we read and loved is great," Kanan said.

After having several acting roles in previous shows, Kanan's role as student director is providing her a chance to experience a new aspect to show production before studying musical theatre in college.

"I get to see how they cast people and how their interpretation affects an actor's interpretation. Instead of taking the criticism, you're giving it, so it's totally different," said Kanan, who will also be playing Sandy in the show.

One of the younger students Kanan will be directing is freshman Zach Burnham, who is playing the role of Johnny Cade. Burnham said that his character, who is a part of the "Greasers," is beaten up prior to the show by the rival gang, and he shows up on stage bandaged from the brawl.

"It's said many times that I'm the one who holds them (the Greasers) together. I'm the glue," Burnham said.

When auditions began for the show, Burnham wasn't sure if he'd want a lead role like Johnny Cade. He thought about a smaller role so that he could take driver's training or join the track team, but when he realized he could get a lead role in just his second high school show, it was a chance too good to refuse.

"I thought, I'm a theatre kid, I might as well give it a shot and get that experience. It's worked out really well," Burnham said.

Burnham isn't the youngest student to be involved in the show, however. Schmidt said that the show's cast and production crew of 65 students range from age 5 to 18.

Schmidt added that other lead roles went to senior Peter Dedaj (Dallas) and sophomore Madison Fairman (Cherry).

"The stage play is very intricate. It changes scenes quickly and artistically and mimics the movie's setting," Schmidt said. "It is a drama, which is very different than the shows we usually put on, which challenges the students to dig deeper into their feelings to become these characters."

"The Outsiders" will be shown at Dakota's auditorium at 7 p.m. April 19-22, and at 2 p.m. April 22-23.

Tickets cost \$10 and are available at [dakotamusical.seatyourself.biz](http://dakotamusical.seatyourself.biz) or at the door a half hour before the show if it is not sold out in advance.