

Chippewa Valley bond proposal stresses safety and strong tech

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Chippewa Valley Public Schools Superintendent Ron Roberts talks about the \$97 million bond proposal that will be on the November ballot. (Macomb Daily staff photos)

With a combined package of improved technology for both security and education, Chippewa Valley Public Schools touted its Safe Schools, Strong Schools bond proposal ahead of the Nov. 6 election Wednesday.

The \$97 million bond proposal would update security technology within school district buildings and update equipment for the district's Career Technical Education center. District officials said the bond would not increase the existing tax, but it would instead extend an existing assessment for eight years.

Superintendent Ron 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 with a security person manning it, 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. Door locks throughout the district would also be made more consistent.

"Safety is at the forefront in the minds of everyone at the schools," Roberts said. "It's an important topic to our parents and our staff and to our students."

Much of the bond proposal was developed after an independent analysis was done last April, followed by town hall type meetings with residents of the district. Roberts said in addition to safety concerns, providing students with the tools to succeed after high school was also a priority.

"I've heard loud and clear from parents and community members at large that they want our kids to have an experience in school that prepares them for when they leave school regardless of what they've going to do," he said. "Whether they plan to attend a four-year institution, a two-year institution, or go straight to the workforce or trade school, they want their child's K-12 education to replicate what's out there in the world. And the world is controlled by tech. So when they leave, we want them to be prepared."

In the wake of school violence that has taken place in the last couple of years nationally and now locally, with the fatal stabbing of a student at Fitzgerald High School only a couple of weeks ago, upgraded school security is a priority for all districts. But Chippewa Valley's bond proposal stops short of adding metal detectors to school entrances. Roberts and Macomb County Sheriff Anthony Wickersham said not only would adding metal detectors be a logistical and staffing problem, it would also broach the fine line between trying to keep school buildings a welcoming place of learning and giving them a feel of a jail or prison.

"What can we do to increase security and still keep intact an appropriate learning environment?" Roberts said. "We can add additional levels of security that we can manage as a school district. We also think about how does this impact kids. There are studies about kids in their school places and their ability to learn and how it relates to feeling safe. There are studies that if you lock down schools too much it negatively affects student learning. So we are balancing safety and student learning. We need to have that kind of environment."

"Logistically, how do we handle this every single day? How do we get them in? We have kids moving all day back and forth between buildings, so it's very difficult," he added about metal detectors. "I would never rule it out. It's not currently in our plan to have metal detectors, we don't know how we

would manage them. But we think what's in the plan really is that next step in security in our buildings."

Wickersham echoed Roberts' thoughts regarding the "logistical nightmare" that would take place trying to get students into Dakota High School, for example, the largest high school in the state, in a timely fashion. He pointed to the liaison officers present at the schools, provided by the Sheriff's Office at the Clinton Township Police Department as a resource to prevent any security issues at school.

"We try to, with our liaison officers, build up that trust, build up that rapport with students," Wickersham said. "They provide a lot of information and kind of give us a heads up about what's going on and what could happen. But shaking everybody down, do you really want to send your child to a jail or prison that only has one way in and one way out, and everybody gets searched on the way in and the way out. It's just not there."

The district also plans to reconfigure the main drive, Cougar Drive, out of Dakota High School off of Heydenreich Road. With an enrollment of nearly 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.

Chippewa Valley Public Schools will be holding a series of community meetings so that interested residents can learn more about the bond. Dates for the meetings include:

- * Oct. 4 at 7 p.m. in the Chippewa Valley High School auditorium
- * Oct. 8 at 7 p.m. in the Wyandot Middle School gym and café
- * Oct. 16 at 7 p.m. in the Dakota High School auditorium
- * Oct. 18 at 7 p.m. in the Algonquin Middle School gym



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