

Transportation Improvement Association recognizes Chippewa Valley

Superintendent discusses how bond furthers traffic goals

- By Nicole Tuttle For The Macomb Daily
- May 8, 2019



Transportation Improvement Association (TIA) CEO Jim Santilli recognized Chippewa Valley Schools for its traffic safety efforts during a district board of education meeting on April 29.



On April 29, Chippewa Valley Schools Superintendent Ron Roberts discussed 2018 bond issue improvements during a district board of education meeting.

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The April 29 Chippewa Valley Schools Board of Education meeting was held at Dakota High School in Macomb Township, a site that is scheduled to see improvements to Cougar Drive this summer.

As Chippewa Valley Schools prepares for school summer traffic improvement projects, it received the bonus of recognition for traffic safety from the Transportation Improvement Association.

During an April 29 Chippewa Valley Schools Board of Education meeting held at Dakota High School in Macomb Township, Transportation Improvement Association (TIA) CEO Jim Santilli recognized the district for its efforts in traffic safety since 2017.

"Obviously, unfortunately, you guys experienced a tragedy years ago. But I commend you, you guys immediately stepped up to the plate and contacted us, as well as other agencies out there and said, 'What can we do to make our environment safer?'" Santilli said.

In November 2016, Dakota sophomore Victoria Cartwright was struck by a Jeep Wrangler driven by a then 16-year-old girl on Heydenreich Road near Vine Drive in the early morning hours. The driver, her then 16-year-old passenger and Cartwright were all headed to the school at the time. Cartwright later died at Henry Ford Macomb Hospital in Clinton Township. No charges were filed.

Cartwright's death led to several roadway improvements in the area of Dakota and other Chippewa Valley Schools through efforts from the district, Macomb Township Board of Trustees, and Macomb County Department of Roads. Eighty-seven streetlights were installed centered around 21 Mile Road and Heydenreich, two miles from Hall Road up to 22 Mile Road on Heydenreich and two miles from Card Road to Romeo Plank along 21 Mile Road. Sidewalks were installed on 21 Mile Road and Heydenreich near a cluster of Chippewa Valley schools.

In 2017, at the request of district officials the TIA made a presentation to the district board of education to discuss its study of traffic and pedestrian safety conducted at Dakota and the surrounding school campuses.

The TIA study found a need for signal timing modifications, which was presented to the Macomb County Department of Roads (MCDR). The MCDR also reduced speeds in the school zone to 30, per legislation, and school speed limit timings were adjusted. Pedestrian crossings at 21 Mile Road and Heydenreich were added, and pedestrian traffic signal work at the crosswalks was completed.

Superintendent Ron Roberts said a 2018 bond issue was predicated on the need for safety. The \$97 million bond issue called for financing to update security technology in district buildings and equipment for the district's career technical education center.

"We will be making improvements in our schools, in our school lots, in our driveways leading to our schools, relative to creating a safer space for our kids," Roberts said.

The bond project schedule dated Feb. 4 outlines construction projects from 2019 to 2023. Summer 2019 projects include Ojibwa Elementary School's parking lot and Dakota's Cougar Drive, both in Macomb Township.

"Working with the TIA, we completed a comprehensive study of the Dakota High School, Seneca Middle School, and Cheyenne Elementary School campuses to include on-site circulation and off-site improvements in signal operations and street lighting," Chippewa Valley Schools Director of School and Community Relations Diane Blain said.

Blain also said in addition to the studies at these Macomb Township schools, a site circulation study was completed at Ojibwa Elementary School in Macomb Township. A district-wide evaluation was conducted of all crossing guard locations.

"The goal was to improve traffic flow and safety both on campus and offsite," Blain said.

The district and TIA identified traffic improvements for the 21 Mile Road and Heydenreich area.

"With the passage of the Safe Schools, Strong Schools proposal, we will make improvements that will widen Cougar Drive to get drivers off Heydenreich Road and onto our school campus quicker to alleviate traffic congestion. We will also reconfigure the 21 Mile Road exit for safer traffic flow," Blain said.

Santilli said although the TIA works with many school districts statewide, Chippewa Valley Schools has been the most progressive in addressing traffic safety issues.

"Not just looking at the engineering component, but also the educational aspect," Santilli said.

It was because of Chippewa Valley's work on traffic safety that the TIA chose to present the district with an award in the fall of 2018 during the TIA Annual Meeting and Law Enforcement Appreciation Breakfast. The event was held at the Suburban Collection Showplace in Novi. Further, it was Dakota High School senior Anna Hunyor, age 17, that won a recent statewide TIA billboard design competition to discourage distracted driving.