

Middle school employee charged in incident that forced lockdown

Victoria E. Freile

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

A Walworth man has been accused of attacking a Wayne County sheriff's deputy working as a school resource officer at a Wayne County middle school Monday morning, Thomas Franco, 19, was charged with two counts of second-degree assault and two counts of second-degree criminal possession of a weapon, all felonies, in connection with the altercation at Wayne Middle School in Wayne Central School District on Monday morning, the Wayne County Sheriff's Office announced Monday night. Franco is a custodian at the school and had not worked there long before Monday's incident, said Chief Deputy Steve Sklenar.

Wayne County Sheriff Barry Virts said that the deputy responded to assist a staff member "who was already engaged in a physical confrontation with the employee who was armed with a knife." Deputies later said that Franco is also accused of brandishing the weapon at school officials.

Franco allegedly resisted arrest, injuring the involved deputy, according to a news release. The encounter occurred around 10 a.m.

The injured deputy was taken to Strong Memorial Hospital and was treated and released. The staff member with whom the suspect originally engaged was not injured.

Franco, who also suffered a minor injury on Monday, was treated at a hospital and taken into police custody, Sklenar said.

"All students are safe," Virts said in the news release. "No students were involved, injured or in danger."

District Superintendent Joseph Siracuse said that no students were involved in or witnessed the incident.

All schools in the Wayne Central School District went into lockdown following the incident.

Siracuse shared several letters with district families on Monday, detailing what he could share about what caused the lockdown.

In his second letter, he told parents, "I want to assure you that your children are in great hands. I am thankful for our staff who responded in a way that kept everyone as safe as possible. I'm thankful to the Wayne County law enforcement agencies who were on the scene to support us."

Since events like Monday's altercation and arrest can "lead to emotional responses," Siracuse said the district will offer extra mental health support for the next few days.

"The safety of our students and staff will remain a top priority," he said.

Franco was arraigned Monday and was remanded to the Wayne County Jail in lieu of \$2,500 cash bail or \$5,000 bond. He is expected to appear in Ontario Town Court at a later date to answer the charges.

Contact Victoria Freile at yfreile@gannett.com. Follow her on Twitter @vfreile and Instagram @vfreile.

