

SUSPECT IN RAPES SAYS HE IS SORRY NEW ASSAULT REPORTED TO POLICE BY SCHOOLGIRL

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The 27-year-old man accused of raping several Detroit schoolgirls passed on a message to his victims as he was escorted by police to court Thursday: "I'm sorry. I apologize."

Prosecutors say **Desselonger Ross** of Detroit raped as many as seven schoolgirls since January. On Thursday, he was arraigned as a habitual offender on one charge of criminal sexual conduct. He is expected to be arraigned on more charges today.

"He's facing eight more charges," said Robert Spada, assistant Wayne County prosecutor. "Of those eight, seven are rapes of schoolgirls."

Meanwhile, another girl told police she was attacked Thursday on her way to school on the west side. Police said the 14-year-old and her 11-year-old sister were walking to Lessinger Middle School around 7:30 a.m. near Joy and Fielding when a man approached them.

Police said the girls ran, but the man caught up to them, dragged the 14-year-old into an alley, knocked her to the ground and sexually assaulted her. The 11-year-old ran to call for help, then returned and jumped on the man's back. The man fled the scene on foot.

Police had a suspect in custody Thursday afternoon. They do not believe the man in custody is the second serial rapist who is being sought.

Spada said **Ross** is responsible for at least three rapes this academic year. In addition, he could be charged with the attempted rape of a woman.

The rapes this fall prompted city officials to set up the Safe Streets program, an attempt to mobilize parents and residents to patrol around schools. Eight girls have previously told police they were raped on the way to school since classes began Sept. 9. A ninth girl, 12, also said she was raped Nov. 15, but police do not categorize the sexual assault with the others.

According to **Ross**' court file, based on police reports, a 17-year-old girl was walking to school Oct. 14 when she was grabbed by **Ross** in the 11600 block of Whitehill near Yorkshire. He took her by the arm and told her to act normally before taking her to the rear of a house. He then told the girl he just wanted to touch her, according to the report.

Police say **Ross** unzipped the girl's coat and fondled her. He told her to turn around, and when she hesitated, he punched her in the face. When she refused his orders, he punched her in the side. **Ross** then raped the girl and ran away, the file states.

When police searched **Ross** ' car Wednesday, they found three pairs of women's underwear, according to court papers. He was identified in a lineup by several teenagers who say he raped them and has admitted to sexually assaulting the 17-year-old.

Ross ' family declined to comment Thursday.

As an habitual offender -- someone who has already been convicted of a felony -- **Ross** faces a minimum sentence of life in prison if convicted.

In 36th District Court, Magistrate B. Pennie Millender remanded **Ross** to the Wayne County Jail "for the safety of the public." He faces a Dec. 22 preliminary examination.

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Caption: Photo RICHARD LEE/Detroit Free Press

Suspect **DesselongerRoss** is arraigned Thursday. Police link him to eight rapes.

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