

Report sheds some light on Trevyan Rowe's troubled life

Provides portrait of youth, beset with trauma and depression

Justin Murphy

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

The state report on the death of Trevyan Rowe shows a confluence of failed systems, inattentive adults and important policies either unwritten or ignored.

In a truer sense, though, the report is a portrait of a frightened little boy, beset with trauma and depression and unable to connect with adults who might help him deal with it.

Trevyan got frightened in fire drills and ran away from class. He made increasingly serious threats of suicide then begged school staff to leave him be. When asked whether he intended to act on his suicidal thoughts, he said no — it would hurt too much.

The report does not shed light on the question of whether Trevyan meant to die by suicide or simply ended up on the Susan B. Anthony-Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge and fell. But it makes clear that the morning of March 8, 2018, was the culmination of a lifetime of unaddressed trauma and mental health concerns.

When he first arrived in Rochester in April 2013, his school records already showed that “he was known to have experienced multiple traumatic events in his life,” and left RCSD staff wondering whether he had post-traumatic stress disorder. It was also noted that he had “roamed and hidden in the classroom when he attended school in Arkansas,” a behavior he repeated within months of his arrival in Rochester.

The report does not elaborate on those traumatic events, though investigators did obtain psychological reports from Trevyan's schools in Arkansas and Texas.

Already by fourth grade, in 2014-15, Trevyan's teacher had noted his erratic mental state — very happy one minute, very upset the next. It was in fifth grade that his suicidal ideations first surfaced: he wrote suicidal comments in school notebooks and “would occasionally raise his hand and ask off-topic questions about attempting suicide during lessons,” according to

even though his scores on anxiety and depression tests were in the most serious range.

Trevyan's suicidal behavior peaked in the six months leading up to his death in March 2018, when he was in seventh grade. In September 2017, students told administrators he had run in between the buses in front of the building in order to harm himself, and he told the school security officer he wanted to kill himself.

When a school administrator asked if he wanted to hurt himself, he asked: “If I say no, can I go home? Can I get on the bus?” The answer, in effect was yes. School staff called the mobile crisis unit again and drove him home, but one of Trevyan's siblings answered the door and said their mother was asleep, and the staff members left.

Painfully shy

In October Trevyan scribbled the word “die” all over a school paper, then told a social worker “it was not about himself.” Weeks later he ran away from school and went to Mt. Hope Cemetery before returning on his own an hour later.

His aunt said last year that Trevyan had gone to the cemetery “to hang himself” but got frightened by a skunk and ran back.

In the last two months before Trevyan died, school staff said he seemed “much happier in general.” His 14th birthday was Feb. 1 and he was excited about the gifts he received. In the days after his death, those who knew Trevyan — his family, his classmates, staff at the Carter Street recreation center he often visited — described him as respectful but withdrawn, almost painfully shy. No one could say where his interests lay or what made him particularly happy.

The state report details the personal efforts of several school staff members — teachers, social workers, administrators — to help Trevyan, even if those efforts were never effectively coordinated.

“(Trevyan) just needs more than what school counseling can provide,” his social worker wrote in September 2017. Whatever it was that he needed, he never got it.

the report. Still at this point he was not assigned to regular counseling.



Threatened suicide

In sixth grade the troubling behavior accelerated; a mobile crisis unit was called in after he threatened suicide, wrote about it in his notebook and gave his belongings away to classmates. Staff talked about writing a behavioral management plan for him but none was ever drafted.

Rowe

“(Trevyan) needs individual counseling to work on his high anxiety and frustration as well as negative feelings about himself,” a social worker wrote in his individualized education plan; still he was not classified as emotionally disturbed, a point the state report stresses as significant,