

Trevyan Rowe report slams ‘serious’ RCSD deficiencies

1 YEAR LATER

School’s support for boy lacking despite suicide threats, more

Justin Murphy

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

More than a year after the death of Trevyan Rowe, a joint investigation by the state Education Department and Attorney General’s Office found serious deficiencies in the boy’s care in the Rochester City School District, even in light of escalating warning signs and suicide threats.

■ Investigators found that Trevyan had written about death and suicide in class assignments, interrupted teachers in class to ask about committing suicide and threatened to run in front of a school bus.

■ He ran away from school once, but still no plan was put in place to keep him from running away.

■ On the day he walked away from school, the adults assigned to monitor students coming off the buses were either standing too close to the door where they could not see him or talking among themselves with their backs to the children.



A joint probe has found serious deficiencies in Trevyan Rowe’s care in the school district.
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Vague or missing protocols around identifying and searching for missing children meant that top district officials did not know he was missing until nearly five hours after the school day ended.

■ “Misunderstanding of disability classifications in a chaotic school climate” contributed to him lacking the support he needed, in particular not being classified as emotionally disturbed despite numerous instances of threatened or attempted suicide.

Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia said the review showed “an astounding lack of support from his school” and urged all educators to read the report to prevent similar tragedies with their own students.

teachers marked Trevyan present for the day. When his absence became public, one attempted to go back into the system and cover it up.

Thousands of volunteers, many mustered from the autism support organization AutismUp, combed the city in falling snow and freezing cold over the weekend, only to receive the dreaded news on Sunday afternoon that a body matching Rowe’s description had been found by divers in the river.

Mayor Lovely Warren immediately announced the suspension of six 911 employees who had not followed protocol. The interim School 12 principal was removed from the building and the three teachers in question were either terminated or put on leave.

The report focuses on four areas: mental health services; special education; attendance; and school safety and transportation. It offers a number of recommendations; it does not recommend or address the question of criminal prosecution.

“School districts and those who are employed by them are in the unique position of having custodial supervision over massive numbers of children every day across New York state, and that position comes with much responsibility,” the report concludes. “It is only by recognizing the gravity of that responsibility, and by relentlessly seeking to improve upon the safety measures put into place on a day-to-day basis at each individual school, that school districts can best seek to avoid another tragedy.”

The lawyer for Trevyan Rowe’s family, Jason Brown, wrote in an email that the report showed “incompetent and inept staff and management, their dereliction of duty and, more importantly, failures of both policy and execution at the district and city level.”

The city of Rochester is hardly implicated, except that it took about 30 minutes for police to arrive at the school the evening of March 8 after first being called.

Nonetheless, Brown continued: “Neither (the) city nor school district can delay or hide any longer. On behalf of Trevyan’s grieving mother and all parents of school-age children in Rochester, we call on (them) to provide some measure of justice for Trevyan’s family, and to fix once and for all the problems and failures that led to this young man’s death.”

Background

Trevyan, 14, died March 8, 2018, after getting off the school bus at James P.B. Duffy School 12 on South Avenue then walking down the street away from the school.

Two of the sentries who should have been standing outside had called in sick that morning, according to the report. One replacement was found, but that person was standing inside the school.

An assistant principal who otherwise would have been standing to the north of the school, where Trevyan walked, had instead gone into the building to track down a parent who had entered with the apparent intention of confronting a teacher.

Trevyan walked north, apparently along the Genesee River on Mt. Hope Avenue, and ended up on the east

The joint Attorney General’s Office and state Education Department investigation was announced less than a week after Trevyan’s body was found; few expected it would last until 2019. Investigators interviewed more than 50 people, including school staff and Trevyan’s family members.

In May Trevyan’s mother, Carrie Houston, filed a notice of claim with RCSD, the city of Rochester, Monroe County and New York state, preserving her right to bring a lawsuit. The family’s lawyer did not respond to a request for comment.

The report says that school officials twice attempted to contact Houston to discuss their concerns about Trevyan’s mental health. She was not home when they came and did not respond to messages they left. The report notes, though, that there was “no outward opposition by her,” and criticized the district for failing to follow up when she did not.

It also clarifies that Trevyan never received a medical diagnosis or educational classification of autism. Instead, the investigators found, he mostly likely had “an untreated mental health disorder” that should have been treated in school as an emotional disturbance.

The school district responded to the report Tuesday morning: “The death of Trevyan Rowe continues to have a profound impact on all of us, and we will always keep him and his family in our thoughts and prayers.

“We have received the State Attorney General’s report and will be reviewing it thoroughly. We have already implemented a number of improved measures to ensure our student attendance and supervision procedures meet the highest standards.”

Mayor Lovely Warren said in a statement: “A child of our city cried out for help and his calls went unanswered. ... The joint report should serve as a clarion call to the school district that it must act expeditiously to ensure all of our children receive the support that they need — especially our most vulnerable special education students.”

This image from a security camera shows Trevyan Rowe in the library driveway after leaving the bus loop at School 12, reportedly undetected.

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end of the Douglass-Anthony Memorial Bridge. Several motorists called 911 shortly after 8 a.m., saying they had seen someone on the bridge, but 911 operators failed to dispatch fire and water rescue crews as they should have. Shortly thereafter he fell into the river.

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