

What happened to Trevyan Rowe?

1-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

14-year-old got off school bus over a year ago, never came home

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One year ago this week, the disappearance of Trevyan Rowe, a seventhgrade student at James P.B. Duffy School 12, triggered a rapid and committed community search over several days. His death brought out admissions of responsibility from the Rochester City School District, city leadership, and prompted widespread grief and introspection. Some new policies have been implemented, but no criminal charges were laid, and the report of the civil investigation by the state Attorney General's Office and the state Education Department has not been completed. Here's how the events unfolded.



Hundreds of people raise LED candles in a show of support and love for Trevyan Rowe during a vigil held for the 14-year-old March 12, 2018 at the Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial. The teen, who had autism, got off his bus and walked away from Rochester School 12 one year ago this week. His body was recovered from the Genesee River on March 11, 2018. SHAWN DOWD/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE



Trevyan Rowe went missing the morning of March 8, 2018. PROVIDED

March 8 — Trevyan goes missing

■ Trevyan Rowe rides to school on the bus Thursday morning but never enters the building at 999 South Ave. Surveillance video shows that he turns and walks away from the building on South Avenue about 7:30

■ At an evening briefing: “We’ve searched every single street, park, location, almost twice,” says Deputy Chief La’Ron Singletary of the Rochester Police Department. “The search will continue until Trevyan is found.”

a.m. Family members later say he was upset about losing his cell phone, and told his sister before he left that he would kill himself.

■ At 7:51 a.m., a surveillance camera captures Trevyan near the intersection of Mt. Hope Avenue and Gregory Street, police said later. The spot is a walk of about three-quarters of a mile from School 12.

■ Beginning about 8:06 a.m., motorists call 911 to report seeing a person now believed to be Trevyan on the edge of the east end of the Douglass-Anthony Memorial Bridge, a walk of three-quarters of a mile from where the youth was last seen. State Police respond a short time later but find nothing. 911 dispatchers send fire/rescue crews.

■ Trevyan fails to come home on the bus late Thursday afternoon, prompting his mother, Carrie Houston, to call the school. His family learns that Trevyan never attended school for the day. An RCSD spokesman later acknowledges that the school district never notified Houston that Trevyan was not present.

■ Trevyan is reported missing to police about 4:45 p.m. and 911 dispatchers alert officers about 5:05 p.m. A search begins and continues well after dark, focused on wooded areas near the school. A State Police helicopter assists with the search.

March 9 — Volunteers turn out

■ Hundreds of volunteers join family and police in the search for Trevyan in Highland Park, Mt. Hope Cemetery and neighborhoods surrounding the school. Police later say they focused on Mt. Hope because Trevyan once went there with the purpose of killing himself.

■ Witnesses who called 911 Thursday about a person on the Douglass-Anthony bridge say they called the police again on Friday after seeing photos of Trevyan to say he may have been the person they saw.

■ Police do not utilize a helicopter because of inclement weather and ask the public to be its eyes and ears in the search. Singletary says Trevyan's cellphone could not be pinged.

March 10 — Search continues

■ More than 1,000 volunteers flock to the Al Sigl Center to help search for Trevyan.

■ An automated emergency call urges community members to check their backyards, sheds, garages, and other spaces where Trevyan might be.

■ Investigators contact witnesses who believe they may have seen Trevyan on the bridge. At an evening briefing, police confirm that scuba teams will search the Genesee River the next day if conditions allow.

March 11 — A body in the river

■ An army of volunteers again gathers at the Al Sigl Center to distribute flyers in high-traffic areas. Police identify several neighborhoods where they think Trevyan may have traveled.

A Monroe County craft sits on the western side of the Genesee River, deployed as part of the search for Trevyan Rowe, who had been missing since March 8, 2018. STEVE ORR/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

■ At a 2:30 p.m. press briefing, Deputy Chief La'Ron Singletary says that search efforts are ongoing. Rowe's mother thanks volunteers for their time and efforts and makes a tearful plea for prayers and the safe return of her son.

disappeared also should have triggered the dispatch of fire and water rescue crews, but that did not occur.

■ City officials announce that six 911-center employees have been suspended after it was determined that 911 calls were not properly dispatched and employees did not follow protocol. New mandatory training is

Members of the Rochester Police Department and Monroe County Sheriff's Office scuba teams launch boats into the Genesee River around 2:30 p.m. They use side-scan sonar equipment to find a body in the waterway just north of the Douglass-Anthony bridge, about 200 feet from the spot where motorists had seen the person on the bridge.

Divers enter the water around 4 p.m. and pull the body from the river about 90 minutes later. Police say the male recovered from the river matches the physical description of Trevyan and his clothing matched the description of what Trevyan was last seen wearing.

Officials, including Mayor Lovely Warren and RCSD Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams, speak at an 8:45 p.m. news conference. Police Chief Michael Ciminelli says the recovered body was taken to the Monroe County Medical Examiner's Office for identification and to undergo an autopsy. Warren praises the community for coming together to search for Trevyan. Deane-Williams refuses to answer specific questions about the teen's disappearance but announces that the district will launch an independent investigation.

March 12 — Vigil brings hundreds

District officials have counselors on hand for students and staff returning to School 12, and for the public. Police Department confirms that the body found in the river has been identified as Trevyan.

Hundreds attend a vigil at the Blue Cross Arena to remember Trevyan's life and support his family.

An internal review by the school district reveals additional details about the circumstances of Trevyan's disappearance.

March 13 — Adult failures

"Adult failures led to a child's death," Mayor Lovely Warren says in a news conference. A rash of phone calls summoning police to the Douglass-Anthony Bridge the morning Trevyan

designed to ensure 911-center employees understand when to dispatch fire and rescue.

City school district officials confirm that three teachers at School 12 marked Trevyan present for school on the day he disappeared. Those three teach-

Carrie Houston, mother of Trevyan Rowe, is embraced by many after the vigil for her son whose disappearance brought an outpouring of community support. PHOTOS BY MAX SCHULTE/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

LED candles were held up at the Trevyan Rowe vigil.

ers were suspended. None of the five staffers who were posted outside the school that morning saw Trevyan leave school grounds.

March 16 — Principal dismissed

The school district dismisses the interim principal at School 12. Bridgitte Griffin had been on the job only a

The misrecorded attendance explains why the 14-year-old boy's mother never received an automated phone call from the school district to notify her that he was absent.

Deane-Williams concedes that Trevyan was not observed leaving school grounds by any of the five staffers who were posted outside to greet students, and says there are "no excuses" for the district not realizing a student was absent until the end of the school day.

■ Deane-Williams asks the district to fund hiring an attendance clerk for each school, a move that would eliminate automated phone calls concerning student absences.

If history is any guide, Dave Andreatta reports, the financial toll could amount to millions of dollars being awarded to relatives of 14-year-old Trevyan.

Two years earlier, the New York City Department of Education settled a wrongful death lawsuit for \$2.7 million in a case with striking similarities to that of Trevyan's.

Jennifer Gkourlias was on medical leave. She is replaced by former principal Vicki Gouveia, who worked at the school for 17 years, from 1995 to 2001.

Gouveia says she is not going into the interim appointment with a timetable or an agenda.

"The first thing I should do is go in and listen," she said. "Listen, watch and very quickly try to make some improvements. But I have to listen to the people that have been there. What do they see as issues? And how long have those issues been going on?"

March 18 — Call for accountability

A *Democrat and Chronicle* editorial said: "Pointing fingers and as signing blame will only make us feel better about letting Trevyan Rowe die. It is ludicrous to think that appointing a new superintendent, bringing back a favorite principal to School 12, or adding a team of attendance clerks throughout the district is the best we can do. These measures won't fix the broken systems on that side of the line. They will do little, if anything, for the children who are still alive.

"We desperately need much bigger and bolder actions than ever before. And, we need them now."

few months and was filling in while Principal

Karl Kristoff, RCSD Chief Counsel, talks to members of the press at a news conference where school district officials admitted fault in the Trevyan Rowe death. MAX SCHULTE/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

of 14-year-old Trevyan submerged in the frigid Genesee River while his teachers at School 12 marked him present in class. He was receiving services for a learning disability and may have had autism as well.

May 13 — RCSD to rename School 12

RCSD School Board President Van White says a name change will help the school move on from Trevyan's death. "This is a year of transition for that school, and I think it could probably use an opportunity to talk about a different, more positive future, given what happened to Trevyan," he says. "Not a new beginning, but a change."

The school is renamed the Anna Murray-Douglass Academy, honoring the first wife of abolitionist and publisher Frederick Douglass.

May 16 — RCSD focuses on wandering

City school board considers new policies on absenteeism, including:

■ Informing staff about students with a history or risk of wandering or eloping, including recent photographs and a description of possible triggers.

March 19 — Investigation

State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman and Education Commissioner Maryellen Elia announce an investigation. The goal, Schneiderman says, is “to get to the bottom of what happened and ensure the district’s policies protect our children moving forward.” Elia says doing so is “imperative”; Joseph Morelle, then the state Assembly majority leader, pledges the state will “do everything in (its) power.”

March 22 - A wake for Trevyan

■ The wake for Trevyan is held , at Bethel Christian Fellowship, 321 East Ave. in Rochester.

The church is filled to capacity, numbering in the hundreds. And the sadness is met with an equal amount of laughter. Trevyan’s family thanks the community for the outpouring of support.

“He’s in God’s hands now,” one man says. “We’ve got to love everybody. It’s the only way to support each other and strengthen our community.”

“I came here tonight to lift up a mother and a community,” another attendee offers. Trevyan’s uncle Kent Handy describes his nephew as a sweet, mildmannered soul who “never had any ruckus about him.” The Rev. Ronald Domina, youth pastor of Bethel Christian Fellowship, recalls Trevyan’s warmth and humor, and the mischievous half-smile he sometimes gave.

■ A promised outside investigation into Trevyan’s death has yet to materialize, but criminal charges against people who are involved in his case are still possible.

April 6 — Symbol of greater failure

Festering discord and a series of high-level departures, reporter Justin Murphy writes, have dropped the Rochester City School District’s special education department, never a model of stability, to a new level of dysfunction in the last several months.

That central office chaos, described by seven people with direct knowledge, has now been invested with the potent symbolism

■ Notifying the police, family members and central office.

■ Cooperating with police, including in sharing video footage and building maps.

■ Specifying staff assignments for cases where a student wanders or elopes.

■ Requiring students with a history of wandering or eloping to carry basic identification at all times. The state Education Department in 2013 directed all schools to incorporate policies around wandering and elopement into their safety plans. Those plans are confidential, so there is no way of knowing whether schools in Rochester or anywhere else followed the state guidance.

May 31 — Family to sue city, RCSD

Trevyan’s mother, Carrie Houston, files a notice of claim against the City of Rochester, the Rochester City School District, Monroe County, the Rochester Fire Department, the Rochester Police Department, New York state, the city’s 911 Emergency Communications Department and others.

Aug. 30 — Autism center opens

The Autism Council of Rochester’s Autism Family Information & Referral Services Center in Gates opens, dedicated to Trevyan’s memory. Members of his family are on hand at the ribbon cutting and his uncle Kent Handy tells those

Hundreds attended a vigil at the Blue Cross Arena to remember Trevyan’s life and support his family.
MAX SCHULTE, @MAXROCPHOTO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

assembled: “We still grieve over Trevyan’s loss, obviously, but things like this help us get through. It’s a good thing to see the community come together. His death is not in vain.”

Nov. 14 — Educator calls for reset

The Rochester City School District needs a complete reset on how it operates, according to a 61-page report by the state-appointed consultant.

The majority of the 106 findings and 84 recommendations from distinguished educator Jaime Aquino stem from unstable and unsteady leadership, starting with the superintendent and emanating down through the central office administration. Decisions in the district, he writes, most often seem to be made with the interests of adults, not children, in mind. Board President Van White rejects those conclusions, questions the way Aquino arrived at them and criticizes the language he used in doing so.

2 019 Jan. 29 — School board called out

Departing RCSD board member member Liz Hallmark writes in an opinion essay that Rochester’s Board of Education is failing the district.

Where things stand in 2019

State investigators have spent months poring over video footage, conducting interviews and reviewing relevant documentation

at the Rochester City School District, but representatives of the Education Department say on Jan. 31 that their work is still underway, with no “firm timeframe for its completion and release.”

The district has adopted new policies meant to prevent similar incidents in the future, including reviewing its wandering and elopement policies, making more proactive calls regarding truant students, taking attendance earlier in the school day and installing a blaring alarm system on toplevel administrators’ cell phones that goes off for a variety of exigencies.

The attorney general’s report is civil, not criminal; Monroe County District Attorney Sandra Doorley already has completed her own criminal investigation and decided against pressing charges. It is very possible, though, that the report will recommend adding staff, buying new software or conducting further review, all of which would need money allotted in the upcoming budget. White said he hopes that any such directives would come with funding attached.

Include reporting by Justin Murphy, Sean Lahman, Gary Craig, Meaghan McDermott, Brian Sharp, Will Cleveland, David Andreatta, Patti Singer, Steve Orr, Victoria Freile and Caurie Putnam.