

Incompetence killed Trevyan Rowe

The death certificate for Trevyan Rowe will likely list the cause of his death as “drowning” or something like “respiratory impairment from submersion in liquid.”

But what really killed Trevyan was incompetence.

Trevyan arrived at James P.B. Duffy School 12 near Highland Park on Thursday around 7:30 a.m. by way of a yellow school bus. School officials knew Trevyan had autism and should have known many children with autism are apt to wander and are drawn to water.

Yet no one — no teacher or administrator or anyone else working in some capacity for the school — was there to greet him at the bus and escort him into school, enabling 14-year-old Trevyan to slip away.

Surveillance video showed him walking along South Avenue away from the school.

For the next seven hours or so, Trevyan’s mother, Carrie Houston, went about her day naturally thinking her son was at school because she never received a phone call telling her otherwise.

Unexcused absences, which Trevyan’s most certainly was, are supposed to generate a robocall from the Rochester City School District to parents to alert them that their child is unaccounted for.

Houston never got that call. Why, remains uncertain at this point, but all reasons lead again to ineptitude on the part of school officials.

Some reports, although unconfirmed by the *Democrat and Chronicle*, suggest the school marked Trevyan present and believed he was in class, where he was supposed to be.

If that was the case, that means none of Trevyan’s classroom teachers or aides who interacted with Trevyan daily, and should have been familiar with his disability and tendencies, bothered to notify the attendance office that Trevyan was missing.

Even if those school employees noted Trevyan’s absence, however, someone working in some capacity at the school somehow bungled executing the robocall to his mother.

We don’t know what happened yet, in part because Superintendent Barbara Deane-Williams has punted on accountability.

Her comments at a news conference late Sunday suggested gathering the facts from School 12 was too onerous for her, and was better suited to an “independent investigation,” the results of which will likely take weeks or months to become public.

“What I expect to do is to maintain the safety policies that are in place,” Deane-Williams said. “We have policies, protocols and practices and we are confident that those are at a level where students are safe.”

In what world is a superintendent confident in the efficacy of policies, protocols and practices that allowed a boy with special needs to wander off from school and die?

It wasn’t until Trevyan didn’t arrive home on the yellow bus late that afternoon that his mother realized something was wrong and called the school demanding answers.

By the time school officials figured out that Trevyan hadn’t been there all day and called police to report him missing, it was 5:15 p.m.

School 12 is one of 16 city public elementary schools that start their day at 7:30 a.m. The school dismisses students at 2 p.m.

Multiple people called 911 between 8 and 8:15 a.m. the day Trevyan wandered off to report seeing a person, now thought to have been Trevyan, on the edge of the Douglass-Anthony Memorial Bridge spanning the Genesee River.

Trevyan's body was fished from the river Sunday afternoon, a few dozen yards from the bridge.

Robocalls for unexcused absences are typically generated 75 minutes after the start of the school day. In the case of School 12, that means Houston should have gotten her call around 8:45 a.m.

That may have been too late for Trevyan.

He may have plunged into the river within minutes of those 911 calls. Indeed, at least one witness spotted a state trooper responding to the calls. The trooper apparently saw nothing amiss.

Then again, perhaps it wouldn't have been too late for Trevyan.

It's often easy to Monday-morning quarterback a tragedy and offer no real answers as to what went wrong and what might have prevented it.

In this case, though, the answer is already there: Someone or some people didn't do their jobs.

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Rowe