

RCSD will consider renaming School 12 to honor Frederick Douglass

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Frederick Douglass may reap yet another honor in his bicentennial celebration, as the Rochester City School District is considering renaming James P.B. Duffy School 12 after him.

The school, across from Highland Hospital on South Avenue, stands on the site of the house where Douglass lived for most of his time in Rochester. That house burned to the ground in 1872, a suspected arson.

The adjacent public library was renamed for Douglass in 2016.

There was, until several years ago, a Frederick Douglass Junior High School on Fernwood Park in northeast Rochester. The building, still referred to as the Douglass campus, now houses Northeast/Northwest College Prep.

There is also a program for very vulnerable students called NorthSTAR, named after the newspaper that Douglass published in Rochester.

School 12 would not necessarily be called Frederick Douglass School 12, school board President Van White said. It could be some other name alluding to him or to his first wife, Anna Douglass, who was essential to the operation of their home as a station on the Underground Railroad. "There are many people who went to that school who don't know who James Duffy was," White said. "The thought is to give the school some connection to Frederick Douglass because that's obviously someone who people know."

Duffy served on the city school board from 1905-32, then served one term in the U.S. House of Representatives, from 1935-37. He later was a state Supreme Court justice, then worked as a lawyer.

Duffy died in 1969. The

school was renamed for him in 1972, just as it was being renovated.

White said a name change would also serve to help the school move on from the death of 14-year-old Trevyan Rowe, who ran away from the school after getting off the bus one morning in March and ended up drowning in the Genesee River.

"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 said. "Not a new beginning, but a change."

Jennifer Gkourlias, who had been principal until going on leave in January, has decided to resign rather than return. Vicki Gouveia, the current acting principal, will remain there until a permanent replacement can be found, White said.

The school board will have a public forum to discuss the renaming question at 6 p.m. Monday, May 21. White said the board hopes to act on the renaming in time for the 2018-19 school year.

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**The site of Frederick Douglass' home is now that of
James P.B. Duffy School 12 on South Avenue in
Rochester. JAY CAPERS/FILE PHOTO**