

Onetime School 12 principal will replace interim leader

Principal

Gouveia will start her new position Monday

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Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

The interim principal at School 12 was dismissed on Friday, one week after a special needs student walked away from the South Avenue campus and later drowned in the Genesee River.

Bridgitte Griffin only had been on the job a few months. She will be replaced by former principal Vicki Gouveia, who worked at the school for 17 years, starting as a teacher and leaving as principal in 2001.

The change was announced to the staff Friday afternoon and later confirmed by the district and Adam Urbanski, president of the teachers union.

“Hopefully, we can begin the healing,” Gouveia said when reached by phone Friday evening.

Griffin was filling in while Principal Jennifer Gkourlias is on medical leave. She was in charge last Thursday when 14-year-old Trevyan Rowe got off the bus and walked away from the school, unnoticed. Three teachers erroneously marked him as “present,” and his family was not alerted until he failed to return home at the end of the day. Police were called, and a weekend-long search ensued, involving hundreds of community volunteers. Rowe’s body was found last Sunday afternoon.

All three teachers have been removed from their posts. Two were substitutes. The third was full-time and has been placed on paid leave, school officials have said.

District spokesman Carlos Garcia said Gouveia would be involved in an ongoing review of the events, “as well as stabilizing the school.”

School officials declined to discuss the reason for replacing Griffin. She was relieved of her duties at the end of the day, Urbanski said. Gouveia was not in attendance. She will report to work on Monday.

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Urbanski met with teachers after the announcement and said the news was well-received, as many think “communications and organization of the school are in need of substantial improvement.” He called Gouveia an experienced principal with a reputation as a strong leader who knows the school and the community.

She served as president of the district’s principals union, the Association of Supervisors and Administrators of Rochester, from 2005 until retiring in 2010. She since has returned to the district as a substitute, the same as Griffin was, and recently completed a seven- week stint at Northeast High School.

Gouveia got the call Friday morning about returning to School 12.

“That’s where I spent a lot of years. My heart is there,” she said.

Gouveia said she was 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?”

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