

Locks kept help from dying teen

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Author: Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

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Doors, chained gate allegedly delayed paramedics in death at high school.

By Karen Bouffard The Detroit News

DETROIT — Locked doors and a chained entry gate kept paramedics from reaching a dying Martin Luther King High School football player in the last minutes before his death Monday in a gym class, according to EMS shift notes and classmates' reports.

Devinne Pettaway, 17, was an honor roll senior who had been accepted at Jackson State University and Albion College, and chose Albion, where he was to play football and pursue his dreams of an engineering career. His parents, devastated, say the school failed to get him prompt medical attention, and didn't even call them to report their son had died.

"He was a wonderful kid," said Theresa **Pettaway**, **Devinne's** mother. "My baby's life was taken away because they had chains on the doors and they couldn't even get to him. They had chains on the chain-link fence outside and they couldn't get in, and then once they got in they couldn't get him back out."

Detroit Public Schools spokesman Steve Wasko said help arrived quickly because the fire station is directly across the street. Wasko did not address the issue of access to the gym once paramedics arrived, and had no information on who placed the 911 call.

"The principal said there was some difficulty obtaining an accurate phone number," he said. "She, in fact, went to the hospital herself, two assistant principals went to the hospital and some coaches went to the hospital as well."

Pettaway was the second King football player to die in four days. On Friday, Jimmel Maddox, 14, a freshman on the junior varsity team, died at Oakwood Hospital in Dearborn after collapsing at home. The parents of both boys claim their sons were in perfect health, but then collapsed. They say neither had asthma, heart disease or any other health problem. No cause of death has been determined yet in either case.

Theresa **Pettaway** said staff at the school did not respond quickly enough when her son fell ill, and her son's classmates called EMS. Information on who made the call was not available from Detroit Police on Tuesday.

"The principal called me (Tuesday) to say she doesn't want any backlash or bad publicity about it," **Pettaway** said. "The friends called the EMS truck and the friends called us. The school never called us yesterday."

Martin Luther King Principal Sharon Robinson did not return calls for comment.

EMS shift notes confirm paramedics tried repeatedly to get into the school before gaining entry. They don't say how long paramedics were delayed.

"The run was created at (2:13 p.m.) and our folks were on the scene by" 2:16 p.m., said city of Detroit spokesman James Canning. "Initially they were unable to gain entry because the gates on the Lafayette side were closed. There was attempts at two doors that were locked. They were hailed by two students at a door (but the students) closed the door and left as the medics approached."

Classmates wrote tributes to the two boys on walls and windows of the school Tuesday. Some cried and hugged each other.

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