



## REBUILDING CITIES DAN HAAR

Move to expand urban development authorities could spark private investment  
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# The Norwalk Hour

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## STATE BOND COMMISSION

# Major overhaul set for intersection

### Glover Avenue intersection will move to Super 7

By Robert Koch

NORWALK — The north end of Glover Avenue will be re-shaped in a major way under an infrastructure improvement project that has received the support of the State Bond Commission. The commission on Friday

approved \$7 million in funding for infrastructure upgrades and safety improvements for the upper end of Glover Avenue at Grist Mill Road. "The money will be used to make the roadway safer and support some of the development that's going to happen there,

while also making it better for many of our businesses and existing housing," state Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff, D-Norwalk, said Monday. "Glover Avenue won't come out to where it comes out to now. It will come out at Super 7. The street itself

See Glover on A8



Eileen Leeds/staff graphic



Contributed photo

Emma Splan, 6, died of flu complications early Sunday morning.

## CHILD FLU DEATH

# Sadness and heartbreak

### Community mourns Norwalk 6-year-old

By Stephanie Kim

NORWALK — Those who knew 6-year-old Emma Splan remember her as a vibrant girl who always smiled, laughed and enjoyed life. That's because kindness was a priority for the Columbus Magnet School first-grader.

She just started receiving an allowance about a month ago and made sure her parents saved half of her first payment to give to children who might need it, like the two girls she knew who did not have as much as her, a family friend said.

She made sure everyone was included, quickly befriend anyone she interacted with. If there ever was someone alone at the playground, she would immediately invite him or her to play.

Emma enjoyed dancing and was an animal lover. A beginner reader, she started to spend time at the humane society reading to cats.

"You've never met a 6-year-old who cared more about how others were being treated. She was very conscious of that," said Sarah Lutkus, a close friend of Emma's mother, Christy.

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Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

Principal Joe Rodriguez walks with students Angelo Montalvan, Alexis Smith and Ellie Grabowski during the Rowayton Elementary School PTA's sixth annual walkathon last October at the school in Norwalk.

## SCHOOL OF DISTINCTION

# Behind the numbers at Rowayton

### Pride, 'community ownership' credited

By Stephanie Kim

NORWALK — Principal Joseph Rodriguez said there is more than one factor that positioned Rowayton Elementary School to become the district's first-ever school of distinction in

the state's accountability system.

The Next Generation Accountability System aims to provide a holistic, multifactor perspective of district and school performance using 12 indicators. Among them are academic growth, arts access and academic achievement status measured by state assessments.

In addition to outperforming the state in most indicators in the 2016-17

report, Rowayton Elementary received two distinctions for being in the top 10 percent of schools in terms of academic growth for all students and for its subgroup of high-needs students. This subgroup includes students who are English-language learners, who have disabilities and who are eligible for free and reduced-price meals.

As an elementary school in an  
See Numbers on A8

## LED BY STUDENTS

# Anti-gun campaign gains support

By Rob Ryser

RIDGEFIELD — A high schooler fed up with congressional inaction on gun safety policy has called for a national high school walkout — an effort that has gained 65,000 supporters in four days.

The call by Ridgefield 15-year-old Lane Murdock for a

day of protest and solidarity on April 20 is one of several youth-inspired movements for gun safety following the Valentine's Day massacre at Florida high school by gunman with an AR 15-style rifle.

"When I heard about the news in Florida, I thought to

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"When I heard about the news in Florida, I thought to myself, 'That's kind of the norm in American culture, and that's not OK.' So I decided to make my petition ..."

Lane Murdock, Ridgefield teen

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Weather: Decreasing clouds with areas of fog. High: 58. Low: 49. Page A10

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## FROM THE FRONT PAGE

## SADNESS

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Lutkus came from Florida to be with the family.

Emma was diagnosed with the flu Thursday and died unexpectedly early Sunday from complications, even though she received a flu shot long before then, Lutkus said.

Emma was brought to Stamford Hospital on Saturday because she started vomiting and was later transferred to Yale New Haven Hospital that night.

"She was alert at the point when she was in the ambulance and when she first got to Yale," Lutkus said. "And then she wasn't."

News of Emma's tragic death has filled the community with sadness and heartbreak, leading to an outpouring of support for the family. A family friend created a GoFundMe page in Emma's honor Sunday, raising more than \$29,000 in less than 24 hours. The



Contributed photo

**Norwalk 6-year-old Emma Splan, middle, died of flu complications early Sunday morning.**

initial \$25,000 goal was raised to \$50,000 on Monday. Hundreds had donated, many posting personal messages of support to the family.

"Our hearts are broken and we pray for peace and love to you and your family," one Columbus Magnet

School family wrote.

"Emma was a very special little girl who made everyone around her feel special too," another person wrote.

Families from the tight-knit community of Columbus Magnet School seemed to be still processing the

tragedy at the family skate day Monday morning at the SoNo Ice House.

Although Ed Kasperek and his family did not personally know Emma, he said the school is a community that loves and cares for every student. His daughter is one of the few hundred

students who attend the school.

"The principal even said he'd be there in the morning to give hugs to everyone," Kasperek said. "It's all about being together and being together as a family and community, and to stay positive and move forward."

Kasperek said it is hard to face the reality of how widespread the flu is this season. Although both his children received flu shots, he worries about their safety and health.

"We're already scared, we're already worried about the flu, because it's going around Connecticut. It's widespread," he said. "And now it's in our school, and that makes us nervous."

A deep cleaning took place at Columbus Magnet School before school resumed Tuesday, according to school Principal Medard Thomas. The district's facilities department added a more aggressive disinfectant to the school's cleaning

supplies, which school custodians will continue to use in the coming weeks — with particular attention on "high touch" areas, Thomas said. Counselors were available to help staff, parents and students.

Emma's death is likely the state's second child flu death of the season, about a month after 10-year-old Nico Mallozzi from New Canaan died of flu-related illness Jan. 14. As of Feb. 10, there had been only one death of someone aged 5 to 18, according to the state Department of Health's most recent flu statistics.

Overall, at least 77 people in Connecticut have died of flu-related illness — the highest number of influenza-associated deaths reported in the past five years.

To make a donation to the Splan family, visit [gofundme.com/emmasplan](http://gofundme.com/emmasplan).

[skim@bearstmediact.com](mailto:skim@bearstmediact.com); 203-842-2568; @stephaniebnkim



Hearst Connecticut Media file photo

**Newtown High School student activist Sarah Clements speaks during the Honor With Action Youth Leadership Summit on Gun Violence Prevention at Newtown High School in Newtown in 2014. Students in Connecticut and nationwide are planning school walkouts to help spur change in gun safety laws.**

## ANTI-GUN

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myself, "That's kind of the norm in American culture, and that's not OK," said Murdock on Monday. "So I decided to make my petition and get a movement started."

Murdock was referring to the massacre of 14 students and three staff members last week at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla. — the deadliest school shooting in America since 2012, when a gunman massacred 26 first-graders and educators at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

Two other days of youth-led civil disobedience are planned next month: a nationwide school walkout on March 14 and a march on Washington, D.C., 10 days later, organized by survivors of the Valentine's Day massacre.

Some parents in a Norwalk Facebook group have started discussing the possibility of a school walkout, though no plans seem to be set as of now. Most parents who commented on the issue seemed to be in favor of having a school walkout, saying it would be an empowering experience for Norwalk high-schoolers. Those who didn't seem to support the idea questioned

whether or not it would be good use of instructional time.

Sarah Clements, a Newtown college student whose mother survived the Sandy Hook shooting, is helping organize the national walkout on March 14.

Clements said the rise of student activism is happening now because of work that began after Sandy Hook in 2012 by nonprofit groups such as Moms Demand Action for Gun Violence Prevention, which help give structure to student anger.

"Young people are using their righteous anger about what happened to their friends," Clements said. "I know very well that feeling of anger after something like this happens so close to you. This is the only way these students know how to heal, plus they are very skilled at using social media."

Murdock, who placed her petition online with the campaign platform change.org, saw her appeal grow by tens of thousands in just a few days.

"There has been too much complacency on the part of politicians when it comes to gun violence," Murdock said in the online appeal. "High School students across the U.S.A. the way to fight back is here."

School superintendents across greater Danbury said

Monday they were aware of students sharing messages of walkouts on social media, and had not yet discussed how to respond with administrators.

Brookfield Schools Superintendent John Barile said talks are planned between high school administrators and student leaders on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump, who has been the target of criticism by some survivors of the Florida shooting, plans to meet with students on Wednesday, the Associated Press reported.

Clements, who founded a youth chapter of the Newtown Action Alliance, said Trump is fueling student activism because he is seen by some students as an opponent of gun policy reform.

"That is also underlying the youth activity we are seeing in our community — this era of Trump that has motivated so many students to speak out," Clements said. "Students today are extremely well-versed in social justice issues, and they know how to use technology to impact their world."

Stephanie Kim contributed to this report.

[rryser@newstimes.com](mailto:rryser@newstimes.com) 203-731-3342

## GLOVER

From page A1

gets changed. It's to support the businesses there now and the future development that is slated to be there."

The immediate area is home to major businesses such as Diageo, Factset Research Systems, Datto, Frontier Communications and General Electric. Grist Mill Village, a 710-unit apartment complex, is under construction at the upper end of Glover Avenue.

Drawings show the north end of Glover Avenue — roughly the last several hundred feet — cutting a new path and emerging at the existing T-intersection of Grist Mill Road and the Route 7 Connector.

The three-way, T-intersection, would be rebuilt into a four-way intersection. It would be rounded to facilitate better traffic flow, with three through-lanes for motorists driving westbound, from Grist Mill Road to the connector, and two through-lanes for those going from the connector to Route 7/Main Avenue, according to the drawings.

Glover Avenue now emerges at Grist Mill Road in its own separate intersection, just east of the Route 7 Connector intersection. That leaves motorists

dealing with an extra set of stoplights along Grist Mill Road, which is choked with traffic at rush hour.

"Traffic is backing up down onto Main Avenue and it (the improvements) are going to make it move a lot quicker," said Norwalk Director of Public Works Bruce Chimento.

Chimento said the start of the project is likely three years out. At this point, dollars are being assembled. He has requested \$4 million in city capital funding over the next four years that will be combined with the state money to build the improvements.

The state is providing the money as grant-in-aid to Norwalk to assist with improvements to alleviate existing traffic issues and facilitate transit-oriented development in the vicinity, according to a summary provided to the bond commission.

Duff said the investment will greatly improve public safety and foster transit-oriented development, economic development and job creation "in this vital corridor," given the proximity of the improvements to Route 7, the Merritt Parkway and the Merritt 7 train station on Metro-North Railroad's Danbury Branch Line.

Mayor Harry Rilling described the bond commission's release of the

money as "great news" for Norwalk. The roadwork is adjacent to the majority of Norwalk's Class A office space, including Merritt 7 Corporate Park and The Towers at Merritt River. The improvements are key to the economic future of Norwalk and the state of Connecticut, he said.

"This investment illustrates the ongoing cooperation between our city and the state of Connecticut to improve our local infrastructure and to bring necessary development to our community," Rilling said. "I want to thank Sen. Duff and the governor for pursuing this funding and getting the job done."

Chimento described the project as a joint effort between the state, the city of Norwalk, and Building and Land Technology, the Stamford-based real estate development company that built The Towers at Merritt River and is constructing Grist Mill Village.

The improvements are not limited to rerouting Glover Avenue and reconfiguring how it connects to Grist Mill Road. The Grist Mill Village plans, as approved by the Norwalk Zoning Commission in January 2016, call for reshaping Glover Avenue into a boulevard with islands, sidewalks and bicycle lanes to connect to the Norwalk River Valley Trail.



Contributed photo

**A rendering of the proposed Grist Mill Village planned by Building and Land Technology on U.S. Surgical's former property north of the Merritt Parkway.**

## NUMBERS

From page A1

affluent part of Norwalk, Rodriguez said it was especially important to him the school received distinction for its high-needs students.

In the 2016-17 school year, Rowayton Elementary had 48 English-language learners, 52 special-education students and 135 students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, according to data from the state Department of Education.

Overall, the school had

425 students from kindergarten to fifth grade.

Rodriguez is in his first year as the school principal, but has been with the district since 1997.

"If there's one thing I've seen at Rowayton, it's a sense of community ownership of the school — and I mean that in the best possible way," Rodriguez said. "They're proud of their school and it's a focal point of the community."

A total of 124 schools in Connecticut received a distinction for placing in the top 10 percent of state schools in terms of high

performance, high growth or great improvement. Some schools, like Rowayton, received more than one distinction.

While the Center for Global Studies did not receive a distinction, the interdistrict magnet school within Brien McMahon High School was in the top quartile based on its accountability index of 87.2 percent.

The center started as the Center for Japanese Studies Abroad in 1991 and has since expanded to include an International Baccalaureate Diploma Program

with the study of Arabic, Chinese and Japanese languages and the cultures and history of Asia and the Middle East, as well as two-week study travel tours. Students take global studies-themed math, science, art, gym, health and other electives through Brien McMahon.

This was the first year the Center for Global Studies received a separate accountability report from Brien McMahon. The center has a capacity of 300 students and has 284 students who come from various parts of Fairfield

County.

"We're really proud," said Julie Parham, director of the Center for Global Studies. "It's really delightful, but this is really reflective of a larger team effort that goes beyond the Center for Global Studies. So we appreciate everyone who has helped make our students successful."

But there is one important factor Parham would like the report to include in its numbers: school culture.

Students at the Center for Global Studies are curious about the world, want

to the travel the world and are willing to put themselves out there to make a difference, Parham said. They are also dedicated, as many of them have to wake up at 5 a.m. to take a train to get to school.

"That culture is evident in our hallways and throughout the building. And someday I hope the state has a way to measure that kind of thing," Parham said.

The 2016-17 Next Generation Accountability report was released Feb. 9 and is the state's third annual report.