

# Ms. President U.S. of Middletown



Berman Middle School student Avaletta Martinez, 18, was recently recognized at the state Capitol for her efforts to spread awareness of youth mental health issues and suicide prevention. Above, Avaletta at First Hill Elementary School in Middletown. Below, Avaletta leading her Project 860 girls committee team.

## 'I saw the rates were really high'

12-year-old encouraging peers to discuss mental health, suicide risk

By Cassandra Day

MIDDLETOWN — Statistics about youth suicide are stark. ... The second leading cause of death among youth is still older, according to Connecticut's Child Death Review Committee. CDM's emergency department screen positive for suicide risk.



"I saw the rates were really high," said Avaletta Martinez, seventh grader at Berman Middle School. "I was personally shocked by how many people struggle with this, but decided to step up and try to make a change."

So she started leading informal suicide awareness at school.

## More than 1,700 Conn. school jobs remain unfilled

By Natasha Sokoloff

Many Connecticut school districts are still struggling to fully staff their classrooms well into the school year. The latest statewide data on educator vacancies shows that, according to the most recent available data, in public school districts there were more than 1,700 open educator positions across public school districts as of February 15.

At least in several districts, but there persists a high vacancy rate across the state. The data, collected in February as part of the annual Educator Vacancy Survey, was published earlier this month on the state's education website.

## Out-of-state bottle, can redemptions going to Senate

By Ken Dixon

HARTFORD — The Legislature's Environment Committee on Wednesday narrowly kept after legislation aimed at supporting the state's efforts to reduce plastic waste. The bill, which would allow the state to buy back plastic bottles and other containers, is now in the hands of the Senate.

The bill is a so-called "bottle bill" program to support container recycling funding. During the committee meeting Wednesday, Sen. Michael Parker, D-Hartford, said a last-minute emergency legislative amendment would strip the bill of its most important provisions. Parker said he would support the bill if the Senate agreed to a similar amendment to the bill.

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while boards in their classrooms, Avaletta said. "I've talked about how just talking to someone, asking them how they were, could really change someone's mind."

"I feel very proud of myself that I have people recognizing me and allowing me to do it."

"They've also established a fund for CDMC to benefit suicide prevention research at the hospital, Montalvo said.

The pandemic exacerbated the youth's struggles with depression and other mental health issues, Montalvo said.

"It's a very difficult path, because when they're around their peers, they don't always feel comfortable speaking about these feelings — like a big taboo," she said.

"It's important to break the stigma, Montalvo continued. "It's OK to not feel OK, and that conversation can happen," she said.

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