

# THE NEWS-TIMES

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## 'We're talking about enormous effects'

Study: Age-based COVID vaccine rollouts could save 85% more lives

By **Jordan Fenster**

A strict age-based vaccine rollout — like the one in Connecticut — could result in 85 percent fewer deaths, according to a study from researchers at the University of California's department of demography.

The study, due to be

released this week, presents a thought experiment, according to lead author Joshua Goldstein.

If the vaccine was rolled out using a lottery system, in which everyone had the same chance of being vaccinated regardless of age, 85 percent more people would die than in a system that followed a strict age-

based rollout.

"We're talking about enormous effects," Goldstein said. "Here's a tiny example. Say that it takes us 150 days to vaccinate everybody, and say that, in the absence of vaccination, there were going to be 2,000 deaths a day. ... Over those 150 days, if we had no vaccine, 300,000 people

would die. If you did a lottery, it turns out that about 150,000 people would die. So you'd save half the lives. If you did age prioritization, only 22,000 people will die."

The real world is far more complex, but Goldstein said "the magnitudes are enormous."

See Rollouts on A10



Patrick Sikes / For Hearst Connecticut Media

Patrick Bettin, of Hartford, gets a vaccination at a mass vaccination center at Rentschler Field in East Hartford on March 1. New research shows that a strict age-based vaccine rollout — like the one in Connecticut — could save 85 percent more lives than a random lottery.

## 'Who you are is how you teach'

Program aims to encourage diverse students to be teachers

By **Julia Perkins**

As a kid, Angie Tovar created worksheets to help her mom learn English.

Her mom always told her she'd become a teacher, but Tovar shrugged it off.

At Danbury High School, however, Tovar — who immigrated from Colombia with her family at age 5 — was encouraged to join a program that aims to inspire and prepare minority students to become teachers.

The program — a partnership between the state, Danbury

schools and Western Connecticut State University — required her to give lessons to an elementary class.

"That's the success — the heart of the matter — that it's from Danbury, for Danbury and back to Danbury."

—Catherine O'Callaghan, professor at WestConn

Tovar said.

That's when Tovar knew she'd be a teacher.

"My mother was right after all," she said.

Tovar started her first year as an educator this fall, teaching third grade at Pembroke Elementary School. She is the first Danbury student to participate in that program and return to Danbury schools as a teacher. But two more former Danbury students could be hired next school year.

"That's the success — the heart of the matter — that it's from Danbury, for Danbury and back to Danbury," said Catherine O'Callaghan, professor and chair of the

See Teach on A6



H John Voorhees III / Hearst Connecticut Media

Angie Tovar is a teacher at Pembroke Elementary School. She went to Danbury schools and participated in a pipeline program through the public schools and Western Connecticut State University that encourages minority students to become teachers. She is the first Danbury student to go through the program and then return to teach at the city's schools.

## As CT home prices spike, buyers act fast with offers

By **Alexander Soule**

It was a new one for Coldwell Banker agent Judy Michaelis: don't bother viewing this house without a building inspector.

Michaelis' clients, who wanted to look at a home in Westport, shelled out \$1,500 to bring one along and — if they liked it — to stamp his approval on the spot.

"It worked out," Michaelis said. "They loved what they saw."

As New York City residents relentlessly prowl Connecticut towns for weekend homes — for a respite from COVID-19 city life, or to put urban life behind them for good —

there's no shortage of real estate stories about multiple offers, snapped-up bids and efforts to sweeten deals.

There's also of plenty of stories about homes going under contract just days after hitting the market, frustrating buyers who are scrambling to cobble together an offer.

"What talks? Money talks," said Joy Kim Metalios, managing director and associate broker of the Metalios Group/Houlihan

Lawrence in Greenwich. "What's the purchase price? What are the terms? Cash is always gold. Since we're in a rising market, we're seeing a lot of ap-

See Offers on A7

## New Milford exceeding COVID vaccine expectations

Officials say operations remain two weeks ahead of schedule

By **Currie Engel**

NEW MILFORD — The town has exceeded initial school and child care staff vaccination clinic goals in its first week of operations, and is taking appointments for frontline workers 55 and older two weeks ahead of schedule, Health Director Lisa Morrissey and Mayor

Pete Bass said.

"I'm really excited to be here this morning with some really positive news, which I think we could all use today," Morrissey said during a Friday Facebook livestream. "We are actually really far ahead of where we thought we would be with vaccinations."

See New Milford on A7

## Bestselling author celebrates Danbury childhood in new book

By **Rob Ryser**

DANBURY — Eric Metaxas is the best-selling author who's taken readers to the worlds of the Protestant reformer Martin Luther, the British abolitionist William Wilberforce and the anti-Nazi martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

As such, it may surprise

fans to learn that Metaxas has chosen a comparatively pedestrian setting for his latest history book — 1970s Danbury, where the author as his own subject recounts the seminal events of his childhood in "the only home I ever really had."

But to those who follow the nonfiction of the 57-year-old Metaxas, or know him by the other hats he



Metaxas

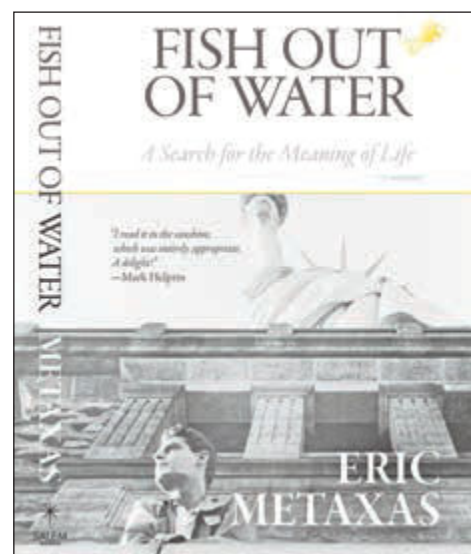
bearing his name — it's no surprise that Metaxas once again finds in the ordinary

wears — the author of 30 children's books, or the host of the nationally syndicated radio show

moments of life the extraordinary intervention of divine inspiration.

"My story shows that our normal ideas about finding the meaning of life are more complicated than we think," Metaxas said during a mid-morning interview last week from his Manhattan home. "I was raised in a faith envi-

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The front jacket of Eric Metaxas' new memoir, "Fish Out of Water."

Contributed photo

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**Weather:** Brisk and colder with plenty of sunshine.  
High: 34. Low: 21. **Page A12**



## TEACH

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education and education psychology department at WestConn.

This Minority and Bilingual Teaching Pipeline program started in 2015 with state funding and aims to address the dire need for educators from diverse backgrounds to better represent the student body. This is a problem locally and across the state and country.

“Quite frankly, I don’t think anyone in the state has done what we’ve done,” Assistant Superintendent Kevin Walston said of the program.

But he said he recognizes the school district needs to further diversify its staff. Just under half of the student body was Hispanic or Latino in 2019-20, but only 7.6 percent of staff identified as that, according to state data.

In Danbury, 86.2 percent of staff were white in 2019-20, 4 percent were Black, 2 percent were Asian, and 0.2 percent were two or more races. Of students, 34 percent were white, 7.2 percent were Black, 6.3 percent were Asian, and 2.2 percent were two or more races.

Sharon Epple, principal at Pembroke, praised the program for its efforts to attract minority and bilingual teachers, who can be “bridges” to students and parents who are new to the country.

She said there are four bilingual teachers, including Tovar, at Pembroke, where 48 percent of students were Hispanic or Latino in 2019-20.

When Epple has popped into Tovar’s virtual classroom, the principal has seen how much the new teacher “adores” children. In some cases, it’s a bonus that Tovar can speak to parents in Spanish, the principal said.

“The commitment and dedication is apparent,” Epple said. “I’ve gotten wonderful feedback on her from parents about her accessibility and communication.”

### Making teaching attractive

The program for juniors and seniors is one of four pre-collegiate partnerships between the schools and WestConn. Participants must have a 3.0 GPA or higher. The first cohort had five students, but last year grew to 13 participants.

The goal is to grow to 30 or even 45 students with more funding, said Robert Pote, director of the pre-collegiate and access programs.

Many participants are first-generation students who may have been encouraged to become doctors or lawyers, he said.

“One thing we’ve really worked hard on, all of us, is trying to make teaching attractive again,” he said. “It’s a civil service position and it’s something that, a lot of times, you’ll find students get into teaching because their parents were teachers. You don’t find that in the first generation category.”

The program recruits by going into child development, psychology and multi-cultural classes and is planning a March 30 panel with participants who have become teachers.

The majority of participants attend WestConn, but some go to other colleges or opt not to study education, said Jessica Coronel, assistant director for the pre-collegiate and access programs. Twenty percent of participants now in college are education majors.

“We have noticed that a lot of them pursue other majors that are serving majors, like social work, psychology or nursing,” Coronel said. “And maybe later on for their master’s, they may consider teaching.”

After Danbury’s program, the legislature required the other residential colleges in the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities to create similar programs.

“Now, it’s just grown by leaps and bounds, both at the private institutions and also at the four CSCUs,” O’Callaghan said.

The state is working on a similar initiative to bring more resources toward teacher recruitment, she said. These efforts are needed more than ever as the state could face a teacher shortage due to COVID, she said.

“We’re facing a tsunami,” O’Callaghan said. “We have so many teachers retiring because of COVID and then we have not enough coming into teaching through all of our different preparation programs.”

### ‘Who you are is how you teach’

Tovar was born in a poor part of Colombia and, after her dad lost his job, her family decided to move to the United States in 2003.

She was in bilingual classes in kindergarten through second grade at Great Plain Elementary School and then attended classes at South Street Elementary School, Rogers Park Middle School and Danbury High School.

Other than the teachers in the bilingual classes, she does not remember having any teachers

who spoke Spanish.

Tovar participated in two other Danbury and WestConn programs — Excel and Upward Bound — that build academic and leadership skills among middle and high school students, respectively.

She was then encouraged to join the pipeline program, which was then its first year. As high schoolers, students earn three college credits and gain experience teaching in a classroom.

“I felt like I was so ahead of the game once I started college,” said Tovar, who graduated from Danbury High School in 2016.

Hector Huertas, the professor who now teaches the classes, described the coursework as rigorous.

“They will feel like if they do this kind of work, then what else can they do as well?” he said. “It’s solidifying self-concept. It’s solidifying who they are professionally, who they are academically, who they are culturally.”

“Because who you are is how you teach,” he added.

The program emphasized multicultural education and how important it is for students to have teachers who look like them or have a similar story to them, Tovar said.

That’s something she has kept in mind. She has shown her students a map of the world and traced how her family moved to the United States, she said.

“I’m very open with my students about my experience and who I am because they were amazed the first time they heard me speak Spanish,” Tovar said.

Two of her 18 students immigrated to the United States over the past year, while about seven others are English learners.

But her ability to speak Spanish is key for parents, too.

“I know what it was like for my parents to come and just be so lost by a system that’s so different,” Tovar said.

A diverse workforce benefits the entire school, Walston said.

“Teachers of color are positive role models for all students, particularly in breaking down negative stereotypes and preparing students to live and work in a multi-racial, ethnic community,” he said.

Tovar graduated from WestConn in May 2020 with her bachelor of science in elementary education, and the program connected her to Danbury schools, where she always knew she wanted to teach.

“The kids in Danbury are so kind and so generous,” Tovar



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**Angie Tovar is a teacher at Pembroke Elementary School. She went to Danbury schools and participated in a pipeline program through the public schools and Western Connecticut State University that encourages minority students to become teachers. She is the first Danbury student to go through the program and then return to teach at Danbury schools.**

said. “They want to work hard. They really do.”

### What else can be done?

U.S. Rep. Jahana Hayes, D-Conn., recently reintroduced a bill to expand and invest in the country’s diverse teacher workforce.

The bill would, in part, provide funding for teacher training programs at colleges, universities and institutions that have historically served people from Black, Hispanic and minority communities.

Danbury officials go to job fairs that target candidates of color and studies best practices from other schools on how to hire a diverse staff, Walston said.

Last academic year, the district partnered with New York University to try to recruit adults in careers like science and engineering to become teachers, incentivizing them with a potential scholarship, as well as student

and substitute teaching in Danbury, Walston said.

Around 100 people from diverse backgrounds and genders attended the event, but the program lost momentum due to COVID, he said. The district plans to reassess the program after the pandemic, he said.

“We will continue to be aggressive in our search for the best candidates and recognize and acknowledge the benefits of having staff of color in our district,” Walston said.

Tovar said providing more opportunities for students to get teaching experience in high school would help.

“That’s the time where it’s a big moment for a lot of teenagers to make a decision of: What am I going to do with my life?” she said. “If we gave them opportunities to be around kids and encourage them...you see what affect you can have on them.”

## BOOK

From page A1

ronment, and as I tell in the book, I had numerous moments where God entered the picture but for some mysterious reason everything did not become completely clear to me until that moment at the end of the book where I have the dream on the frozen surface of Candlewood Lake.”

The goal, he says, is for people to identify their own experiences in his story.

“My story is typical of

faith journeys in that it is atypical – in other words, a lot of us have ideas about how these stories are supposed to go, but my story definitely did not follow any of those formulas,” Metaxas told The News-Times.” It is my earnest hope that people who are puzzling out the meaning of their own lives will get some help from this story.”

Readers interested in Metaxas’ “Fish Out of Water: A Search for the Meaning of Life” should beware of some of the advance publicity. Metaxas’ memoir is not, as Kirkus Reviews has suggested, “reminiscent

of St. Augustine’s ‘Confessions.’” – either in the intensity or the intimacy of its dialogue with God.

“What I really set out to do as much as anything is tell the many seriously hilarious stories that I have been telling my whole life,” Metaxas told Hearst Connecticut Media. “I wanted it to be a fun and often humorous read so it would be an enjoyable journey for the reader, but I knew in telling those funny stories it would help the reader to really understand who I was and what I was going through on this journey.”

As Metaxas notes, the

400-page memoir is saturated with the minutia of Danbury life in the 1970s, when everything was an event. If the grass grows two feet tall, off the reader goes with Metaxas to buy a lawnmower. If his parents decide to move the carpeting from their bedroom to the boy’s bedroom upstairs, the reader goes on that journey, too.

The payoff is that by considering no detail too small, Metaxas will sometimes wow the reader with his humorous powers, such as when the family cat, Rudy, entered the house after being sprayed by a skunk.

“It was outstandingly horrific, like something you would associate with a demonic presence or with the torrid belches of Beelzebub or a giant’s vomit, containing gobbets of half-digested peasants and oxen,” Metaxas writes.

In another moment, it’s hard not to smile when the pre-pubescent narrator, who was already younger than everyone in his class because he was bumped-up a grade, describes the horror of being bused to Broadview Junior High School.

“In sixth grade, I had been among the older kids in a relatively small school, whose windows were decorated with construction paper pumpkins or turkeys or snowflakes or hearts, while now I was suddenly one of the youngest and smallest kids in a roiling ocean of acne and peer pressure, with nary a hallway lacking magic-marked genitalia.”

Here and throughout the memoir, Metaxas doesn’t shy from telling the truth of his experience in Danbury. In fact, in a footnote

about Broadview, Metaxas doubles down, writing: “And to those rare alumni who do not share this sentiment, may I on behalf of the rest of us send along our heartiest best wishes to you in your life of crime?”

To be sure, readers looking for a piece of themselves from Danbury in the 1970s are bound to find the nostalgia they seek in the middle chapters of the memoir, where Metaxas lovingly chronicles his journey from a New York City kid who never quite fit in, to being the 1980 valedictorian of Danbury High School, and later graduating from Yale.

The vision from God on Candlewood Lake he saves for the end of the memoir.

“It is not so much a story about conversion as it is about what happens on the way to conversion,” Metaxas said from his Manhattan home last week.

### The Danbury heartland

Much of why Metaxas credits Danbury with giving him “an official introduction to America” is that the Hat City 50 years ago was such a contrast from the Big Apple.

“In 1972 Danbury, Connecticut, was a sleepy town of fifty thousand working and middle-class families four-score miles from Manhattan, magically just beyond commuting reach,” Metaxas writes. “So living there was like being in the heartland of the country, smack dab in the middle of America. Which was why leaving the multi-ethnic stew of urban Queens and our Greek parochial school for “the country” felt like we were finally really becoming fully American—and weren’t we?”

Punctuating the mun-

dane days of Metaxas’ Danbury childhood are deep reservoirs of meaning and pain – especially when the young narrator navigates a string of unpopular priests at his church. In one scene, he recalls watching a priest beat his screaming son with a ruler.

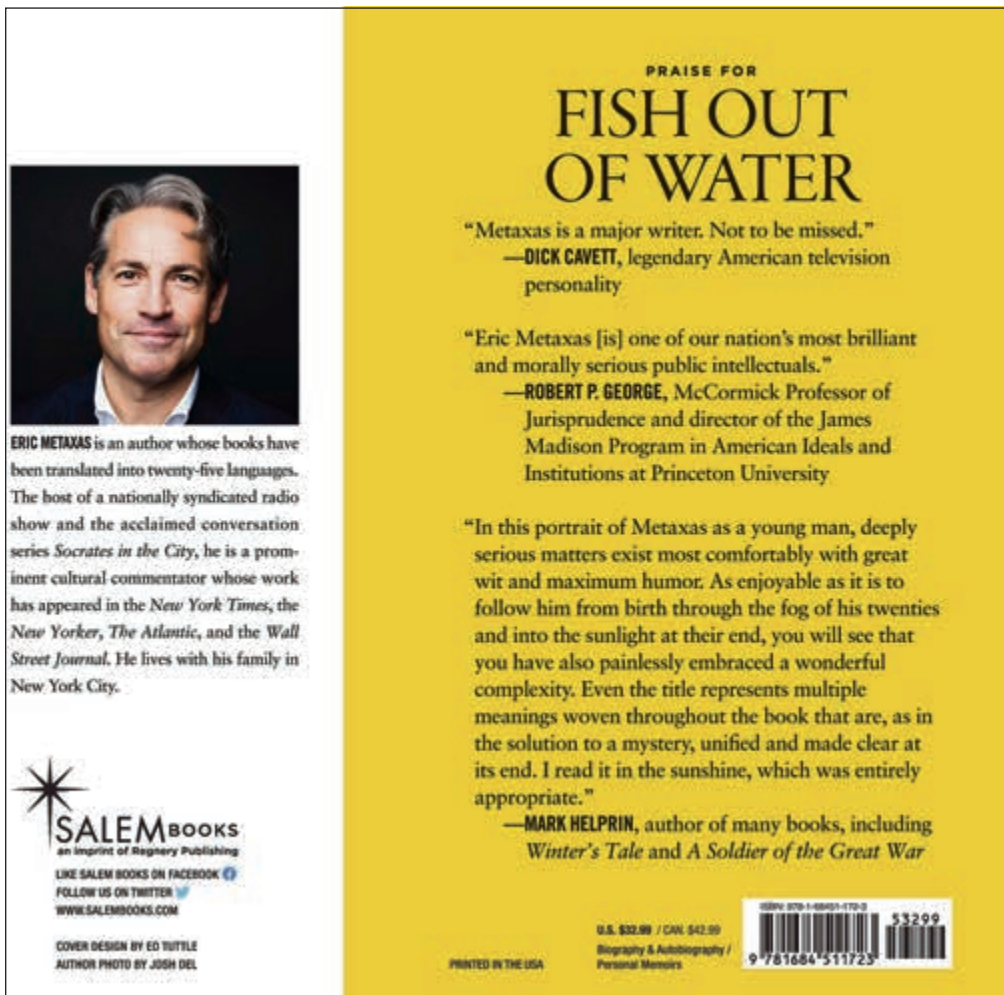
“In a way this book is a cautionary tale for people in some faith environments that, like my own church in Danbury, might be genuinely wonderful, but at the same time might not adequately prepare them for the aggressively secular environment of college or the world beyond that community,” Metaxas said last week.

This is where the Candlewood Lake dream comes in – an event Metaxas describes in the book where “Eternity broke into my life while I was sleeping and worked its ways backwards and forwards, making sense of the past and the future.”

The short version of the memoir’s climactic dream scene is that God gave Metaxas in a dream precisely what 25-year-old Yale graduate needed to make sense of life’s contractions.

“It is obvious that God knew how to reach me in a way we would describe as miraculous or mystical, because I was intellectually very gummed up and in some sense paralyzed into inaction, and could never have gotten myself out of all the bramble of my intellectual objections,” Metaxas said during last week’s interview. “This vision was God’s way of blowing my mind so that I would know without any doubt that it was he.”

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Contributed photo

The back jacket of Eric Metaxas’ new memoir, “Fish Out of Water.”