

Girl 7 Killed in Hit - Run West New York, New Jersey

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WEST NEW YORK — Elizabeth Perez was able to wipe away the tears from her 7-year-old daughter's cheeks, but she knew they would be back after the girl realized she would never play with her friend Sheyla again.

"She understands death, but she doesn't understand that you're gone forever," said Perez, of West New York, whose daughter Briana was a friend of Sheyla Pichardo, also 7.

Authorities said Sheyla was struck and killed Monday morning by the driver of a black SUV as she and her mother crossed VanBuren Place at 61st Street on their way to School No. 1, where Sheyla was in 1st grade. Her mother, Yeime Vital, 32, was taken to Palisade Medical Center, where she remained hospitalized Monday night for treatment of unspecified injuries. Officials of the West New York Police Department and the Hudson County Sheriff's Office said they were looking for the driver of the late model Chevy Tahoe that struck them both, then sped away from the scene. The SUV might have sustained minor damage to the front bumper, near the license plate, they said. The driver was described as a white male, possibly Latino, in his 30's. Authorities asked anyone with information to call the West New York Police at 201-295-5000, the Hudson County Sheriff's Office at 201-915-1300, or a confidential tip line, 201-332-4276.

Sheriff sends strong message to driver who killed 7-year-old
Authorities are searching for a hit-and-run driver who killed a girl on her way to school Monday in West New York.

West New York Mayor Felix Roque said he had been assured by Superintendent of Schools Clara Herrera that counseling was being made available to students and other members of the School No. 1 community on Monday, and that it would continue to be available this week.

Many parents, children and others gathered Monday afternoon around the intersection, where a makeshift memorial of votive candles and plush toys had been set up.

Officials looking for SUV involved in hit and run that killed 7-year-old
The hit and run happened at 61 St. and VanBuren Pl. in West New York on Monday morning. Call 201-295-5000 or 201-915-1300 with any information. Confidential tip line is 201-332-4276.
2/29/16 (Video courtesy of Hudson County Sheriff's office)

"Mucha pena, mucha pena" Jenny Lopez, a School No. 1 mom, said in Spanish, meaning "Very sad," as she held the hand of her 7-year-old son, Jordan.

Rebecca Sebecke, a veteran West New York school crossing guard, whose post is one block west of the fatal intersection, said she could not recall another child being fatally struck while walking to school.

"I'm 24 years here," said Sebecke. "Nothing ever happens around here."

There was no crossing guard at the intersection where the accident occurred, nor was there a traffic light or stop sign on 61st Street, which might have checked the SUV before it turned left from there onto VanBuren.

"There's no crossing guard! Can you believe that," said another School No. 1 mom, Wendy Rivera, who was walking her daughter, first grader Jenyce Fuentes, 7, home on Monday afternoon.

But Mayor Roque and West New York Commissioner Susan Colacurcio vowed after a City Hall press conference on Monday that crossing guards would be assigned to the intersection, and to others in the area, as soon as next week. Other safety improvements, including speed bumps, might also be installed, they said. The next Board of Commissioners meeting is March 17. West New Yorker Yolanda Garcia's children are all grown up, but she was among dozens of people at the intersection on Monday.

"It's so sad," Garcia said, taking in the somber scene Monday afternoon, which was at odds with the sunny, blue skies overhead. She and others knew Vital from the nail salon where she worked a couple of blocks away, including Roque, who pledged to pay Sheyla's funeral expenses.

"They're a good family," said Roque, adding that Vital did his and his wife's nails.

Garcia and others gathered by the intersection were confounded at how anyone could run over a little girl and then drive away.

"I hope they get him as soon as possible," she said, "so her body can rest in peace." ***(Click Here for more info and pictures)***