

NORTH ANDOVER

# Student puts civics into action with proposals

By Angelina Berube  
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NORTH ANDOVER — Age knows no limits when it comes to civic engagement.

North Andover High School junior Mariah Eskel, 17, is proof of that as she has actively engaged in advocacy and policy development since the eighth grade and now awaits the next steps on moving two climate-focused bills through the state Legislature.

A civics project on William Symmes Jr. bringing to light his role in the ratification of the U.S. Constitution initiated her passion for advocacy. Along with other students in her class, she identified a gap in public awareness in town about the Massachusetts representative's contributions to history.

Eskel said the experience introduced her and her classmates to the process of civic engagement and how local

action can lead to meaningful change.

The experience spurred her to partner with former classmate Sofia FloresQuero Llamas to work on two proposals on climate policy. The two students researched environmental policy and how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Both bills were filed in the Statehouse and referred to committees last year.

Eskel said she became interested in the subject of climate change after watching a lot of TV news.

"It's important to engage in these issues and to make this world a better place because it's hard to complain about it if you're not trying to fix it," she said.

In addition to keeping a close eye on the news, she also built on what she learned from her middle-school civics teacher, Patrick McGravey.

Eskel said the civics class was the turning point for her.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

North Andover High School junior Mariah Eskel stands in front of the Statehouse.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

North Andover High School junior Mariah Eskel, bottom center, testifies virtually on a bill she petitioned with state Sen. Bruce Tarr.

It was there she realized if she wanted to make a change, she could.

McGravey was also the one who introduced her to Sen. Bruce Tarr, R-Gloucester, with whom she has collaborated for almost three years now.

Eskel and FloresQuero Llamas drafted a proposal to

incentivize renewable energy adoption for businesses and presented it to Tarr, who worked with them on filing it as a piece of legislation in the Statehouse. The bill was proposed as a tax incentive for renewable energy investments and is before the Massachusetts Joint Committee

on Revenue. It is scheduled to be heard June 25 by the committee.

While they drafted that bill with Tarr, the students developed another proposal to advance research on grid battery storage technology for long-term energy sustainability.

She said Tarr challenged her and FloresQuero Llamas to research the topic and how grid battery storage could be more reliable.

She said they determined research needs to be conducted on how to rely less on fossil fuels and how this ties in with the renewable energy bill. The proposal has moved onto the next committee after it was referred to the Massachusetts Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy.

Eskel testified virtually last summer on the battery storage bill.

"The main goals were to encourage participation in

clean energy, reduce our overall carbon emissions, and then make sustainable energy solutions more accessible statewide," Eskel said.

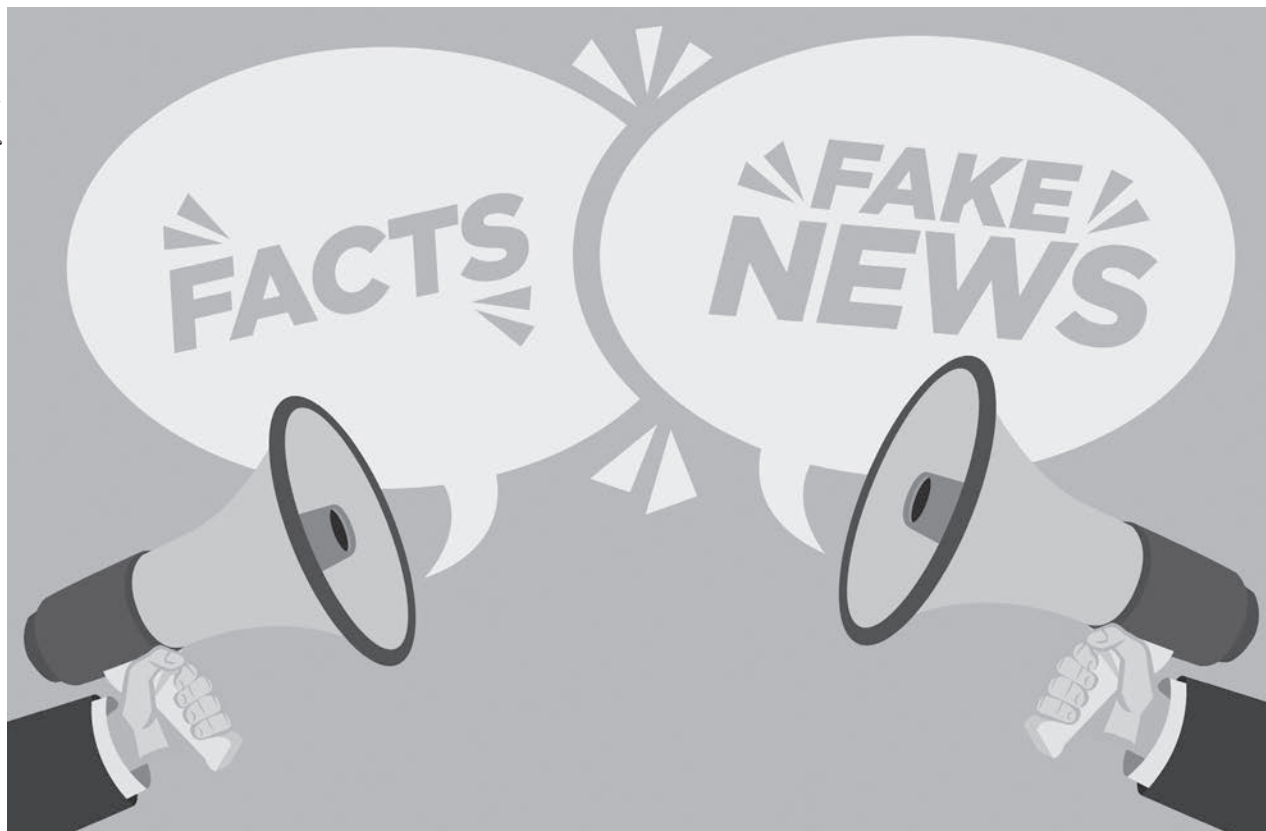
With these projects in the works, she isn't slowing down with her policy initiatives.

Eskel is currently working on a proposal focused on addressing inflation by improving economic efficiency and addressing high costs. She said Tarr plans to file the bill in January 2027 during the next legislative session.

"We made it so there were local manufacturing incentives, supporting domestic production and strengthening local economies," Eskel said.

The junior said she finds economics interesting because it affects everyone.

"You go to the food store, the prices impact you. You go to buy clothes, the prices impact you," she said. "I wanted to see how we could combat that and hopefully bring inflation down."



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# Where every light matters

## Kaleidoscope Crew brings inclusion to life at Austin Prep

By Ciera Balfe

» Austin Prep Class of '27

Austin Prep has taken a bold step toward living its Augustinian mission with the launch of the Kaleidoscope Crew, a new program that employs adults with disabilities to support various school departments.

The initiative, developed in partnership with BrightBridge Neurodiversity Workforce Partners, reflects the motto, “With each unique light, together we shine,” a phrase chosen by students and faculty last year.

The program’s name was inspired by the kaleidoscope’s ability to transform individual fragments into a unified, radiant design.

“Just as the shifting colors and patterns of a kaleidoscope form one radiant design, the Kaleidoscope Crew represents how the distinct gifts of every individual combine to create something extraordinary,” Head of School Dr. James Hickey shared in a recent email to the school community.

The collaboration with BrightBridge aligns with the Austin Prep commitment to Veritas, Unitas, and Caritas, as well as the Augustinian belief that “God loves each of us as if there were only one of us.”

That fitting quote from St. Augustine was included in Dr. Hickey’s email and further emphasizes that the program transcends being labeled as just an employment initiative; it is also a verification of the inherent dignity of every individual, created in the Image and Likeness of God.

According to the Special Olympics website, “Only 44% of adults with IDD aged 21-64 are in the labor force,” a statistic that underscores the inherent urgency of programs like the Kaleidoscope Crew.

BrightBridge’s mission to empower individuals with differing abilities mirrors that of the Austin Prep goal of forming students with Augustinian-like hearts and a deep compassion and sense of empathy.

For Marla Pascucci-Byrne (aka Mrs. P), a crucial faculty member of the Art and Design Department, the program has brought both practical support and emotional fulfillment. She recalls



COURTESY PHOTO

**Mia Kruppa, a member of Austin Prep’s Kaleidoscope Crew, assists in the Tech Department as part of the school’s new initiative supporting adults with disabilities through meaningful employment and community inclusion.**

her first meeting with Casey O’Donnell, a crew member who assists with costume organization for arts productions such as “The Nutcracker.”

“Meeting Casey was a really meaningful experience,” Mrs. P said. “We connected right away. He has bright blue eyes and a glowing smile. We had so much in common because he’s a dancer too, and he performs in ‘The Nutcracker’ with his company, too.”

O’Donnell’s involvement backstage during last year’s performance was a highlight for Mrs. P, who emphasized how his presence added a new layer of joy and connection to the school community.

The program’s impact extends beyond the arts. Assistant Director of Technology Todd Ackerman said he has witnessed firsthand how Mia

Kruppa and Leia Brown, two of the Kaleidoscope Crew members, have brought energy and organization to the Tech Department.

“They’ve helped tidy up our space, refill paper and toner, and are great with people who come in for tech help,” he said.

“Their curiosity about how the equipment works was really genuine,” he added. “You could see they were proud to be contributing.”

For Mr. Ackerman, the program’s greatest success is its ability to create a welcoming environment.

“When someone walks into the Tech office and is greeted right away, it sets a positive tone,” he explained. “It helps people feel comfortable asking for help.”

The Kaleidoscope Crew goes

beyond filling roles; it is Austin Prep’s first step in creating a more inclusive future for students, faculty, and crew members. Mrs. P said she sees the program as a living embodiment of Austin Prep’s values.

“The Kaleidoscope Crew is all about unitas,” she said, articulating that “together, we’re connecting our school community with new friends who make Austin an even brighter place.”

She urges students to take the initiative to foster inclusion.

“The very simplest ways can mean the most. Just start by saying ‘hello,’ introduce yourself, and welcome our new friends to the community,” she said. “Be inclusive and treat others with respect, patience, and kindness.”

Mr. Ackerman echoed this

sentiment, noting how the crew’s presence has softened some barriers and humanized the ideas of disability for students and faculty alike.

Mrs. P said Austin Prep’s “students have Caritas in their hearts,” adding that “connecting with people from the Kaleidoscope Crew can show them that diversity and inclusion are important in our everyday lives.”

As the program enters its first full year, both Mrs. P and Mr. Ackerman are optimistic about its growth.

Mrs. P implies that she envisions future collaborations with the Crew and students, which will be an exciting addition to the theater program. Mr. Ackerman hopes to expand the program into other departments where structured, routine tasks could benefit from the crew’s contributions.



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# A Night at Gatsby's

## Methuen Junior Prom a memory-maker for students

By Janely Sanchez & Sophia Polit

› Methuen High School

METHUEN — High School juniors enjoyed their prom with a “Great Gatsby” theme April 2, giving them a chance to break out their formal attire for dinner, photo opportunities, dancing and socializing.

The evening began with a standout meal at Castleton Banquet and Conference Center in Windham, where students enjoyed a wide array of sumptuous dishes including steak, macaroni and cheese, lasagna, alfredo, other pastas and a variety of salads. Unique and classic beverages also were served, with the iconic Shirley Temples being a standout.

“Out of the school events, the food shocked me at how good it was and exceeded my expectations,” said junior Elier Jaquez Guante.

While the event was organized specifically for Methuen High School juniors, guests from other grades and schools were allowed



Students pose for photos at “The Great Gatsby” themed Junior Prom in Methuen in April.

to be invited. Tickets ranged from \$80 to \$90, depending upon when they were purchased.

In the memorabilia department, students worked alongside Geskus Studios for photoshoots featuring adorable props that they could acquire in print. Many students

brought their own cameras to take personal photos of their friends at their tables and high-action dancing pictures.

“It was so fun and cute to take pictures with my friends,” junior Bree Yameen said of her experience with Geskus Studios. “I loved the little

hats and signs that they gave us. You could tell it was high quality!”

A constant stream of music kept the mood flowing, with lots of energy expended on the dance floor.

“It was literally so fun and crazy,” junior Lila Smith recounted.

“I especially loved when

everyone made a circle and Elier and Tayshawn started dancing in the middle and everyone cheered,” she added. “The energy is always awesome when we are all dancing.”

The Junior Student Council was responsible for overseeing preparation of the memorable event.

## EDITORIAL

# E-bikes provide many benefits but need regulation

E-bikes are a wonderful innovation, especially in Massachusetts, where the cost of living is high and our streets are clogged with cars.

The machines, which have electric motors to assist with propulsion, are also a largely unregulated menace, causing a risk to cyclists, pedestrians and their own riders at an accelerating rate.

Now Gov. Maura Healey has put forward a proposed package of rules that would guide the use of e-bikes, e-scooters and mopeds, hopefully promoting safety while not throttling an emerging, useful transportation option.

It's a good start, and it

has the benefit of seeing the micromobility devices as an asset to be managed, not a scourge to be snuffed out.

For a relatively small price when compared to the cost of an automobile, commuters can have transportation to and from work, school and errands. That takes cars off the streets and improves air quality.

As a state commission empaneled to study so-called “micromobility” noted, “in Massachusetts, 57% of all trips are 3 miles or fewer – a typical biking and scooting distance for many people – and yet 80% of these trips are currently made in

automobiles.”

E-bikes, scooters and mopeds, the Special Commission on Micromobility noted, “offer people a convenient, affordable and low-emission way to travel short distances, which make up a large share of daily trips. Micromobility can help reduce traffic congestion, lower greenhouse gas emissions and expand access to jobs, schools and services.”

However, the annoyances – and outright dangers – that accompany the explosions in the use of the vehicles can't be glossed over.

Cyclists using motor-assisted devices often veer in and out of traffic, cut off those

using traditional bikes, and even travel on the sidewalk, putting pedestrians at risk.

Nationwide, micromobility issues have increased roughly 23% a year since 2017, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Now, more than 90,000 injuries from e-bike crashes are reported every year.

“We are seeing too much reckless behavior, more crashes and close calls, and too many people, especially pedestrians and young riders, are at risk,” Healey said earlier this week.

Currently, much of the regulation of motorized bikes is left to the commonwealth's

351 cities and towns, which has led to a hodgepodge of rules and regulations.

Healey's proposal would address that, and would regulate e-bikes based on how fast they can go and other factors:

**A low-speed, or “Tier O”** e-bike for example, would follow bike lane rules. Riders 16 and under would be required to wear helmets. Such bikes top out at 20 mph.

**Faster devices like mopeds** would be limited use by those 16 years of age and older, and those using them would be subject to registration, insurance and roadway restrictions.

**–New rules would ban most**

micromobility devices from sidewalks to better protect pedestrians.

“The creation of categories related to speed makes it possible to create a safer environment for all users of our roadways, bike infrastructure, and sidewalks,” said Timothy King, in-house counsel for the Massachusetts Coalition of Police. “Enforcement is necessary and this legislation goes a long way in assisting law enforcement in their efforts in protecting every one of us.”

The rules proposed here are modest and common sense. Here's hoping the Legislature addresses them quickly.

# A 7th-grader at No. 1 singles?

## Carter Shah holds court for Austin Prep tennis

Most 7th-graders are just beginning to adjust to middle-school sports. Meanwhile, Marblehead 14-year-old Carter Shah already is leading a varsity tennis lineup at Austin Prep.

As the Reading-based school's No. 1 singles player, Shah competes every day against older, more experienced opponents, many of whom are nearly four his senior.

According to boys' varsity tennis Head Coach Larry Lebatique, it's almost unheard of.

"I'd say that happens at a very, very low percentage," said Lebatique, who has had younger players in the past, but not quite on this level.

Shah has minimal family background in tennis. His mother played in high school, and his father never played at all.

Carter began participating in group clinics at around 7 years of age at Bass River Tennis Club, where he met Lebatique, the head pro, and quickly took a liking to the sport. Since then, his development has been rapid.

"He picked up the game pretty easily," Lebatique said. "The skill set that he had was really, really good, so he was able to really advance his level at a fast pace."

Now, Shah trains at Montoya Tennis Academy. In the offseason, he runs on the middle-school cross country team and competes on the varsity ski team, building endurance for the courts.

His growth has not gone unnoticed. Lebatique has worked with Shah since he was 9, watching his game evolve at a striking pace.

When it came time to choose a new school (Shah previously attended Tower School in Marblehead) his family felt drawn to Austin Prep. Despite the long daily commute



Tennis talent seventh-grader Carter Shah is leading Austin Prep's varsity tennis team as a 14-year-old, a rare accomplishment to say the least, according to Head Coach Larry Lebatique.

from Marblehead, they were impressed by the school's curriculum and values.

"And I really do think it was a plus with me being the coach there and already having a relationship with Shah's family," Lebatique added.

## Charging the net: A fast rise

His talent and athleticism were not enough to earn the top spot immediately though. Lebatique admitted he considered placing Shah at No. 1 singles as early as his sixth-grade season, during which he played No. 2 singles. But he ultimately held off, largely due to maturity.

Now in the role, Shah is

proving he can compete. But both player and coach agree that the biggest challenge is mental.

"Playing at number 1, everybody's the same with their skill set and their abilities. It's more mentality-wise, staying in there," Lebatique said. "When you're down, staying in there. And when you're up, still pressing on the gas."

Shah is already aware of that difference. While he acknowledges feeling pressure at times, he's learning how to manage it. "I can sometimes feel pressure," Shah said. "But most of the time my teammates are there to help me keep that pressure off of me."

The support system has been key. Shah points to teammates

like senior Capts. Shane Miller and Bodhi Rouse as mentors who help him stay composed during matches.

## The toughest rally is often mental

On the court, Shah's game continues to evolve. He cites consistency as a major focus, especially when facing older, physically stronger opponents.

"They are bigger than me, taller," he said. "So I just play the ball and keep it in."

But his biggest area for growth, he says, is mental.

"My mentality, that's a big part of tennis," Shah said. "And my serve, keeping it in consistently."

than me," Shah said. "So I need to shake it off and move to the next one."

Alongside "having the glory of winning," Shah cites a family tradition as his main motivation for winning matches.

"Me and my family, we have this little thing going on," he said. "If I beat someone that's better than me, they'll get me a treat after, like food from a fast food place."

The balance between confidence and patience is what makes Shah's position so unique. While he already holds the top spot in the lineup, he doesn't yet see himself as a leader.

"I think the senior captains are the leaders," he said. "Being a leader, that's kind of a big role."

Someday, however, he hopes to hold a position as a captain.

## Still growing, already winning

So far this season, Shah has already won three matches at the varsity level. Now, he is focused on improving, supporting his teammates, and continuing to grow into his role.

His goals for the season are simple, he says: Win matches, be a good teammate, and keep developing his game.

Looking ahead, both Shah and his coach see a high ceiling. Lebatique believes that if Shah continues to develop, especially mentally, his potential is wide open.

"The sky's the limit," he said. "I can definitely see him playing at the college level."

For Shah, that future is still taking shape. But for now, he's already doing something few players ever do: competing and winning far ahead of his time.

And there are more Shahs to come: Carter's sixth-grade twin siblings, Cameron and Charley, are set to join Austin Prep next year, giving the Cougars their own version of mixed doubles as both follow him onto the courts.

That mindset is already being tested in high-pressure situations. In one of his toughest matches this season, Shah pushed a senior opponent to a tiebreaker after losing the first set. Though he ultimately lost, he took something important from the experience.

"Staying in the game," he said.

Even during matches, Shah admits his thoughts can race.

"It's a lot that goes through my mind," he said. "I think of what would happen, like scenarios, if I would win or if I don't win."

But he's also learning to keep perspective.

"If I didn't win, they're a senior in high school or older



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