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February 11, 2026

BUILDING CITIZENSHIP

North Andover civics class drives student engagement

By Terry Date

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NORTH ANDOVER — Civics in Action, a class at North Andover Middle School taught by Patrick McGravey, leaps feet-first into citizenship and American governance.

Since 2018, when then-Gov. Charlie Baker signed the Civics in Education bill into law, the subject has been a mandatory part of K-12 education, with a required Grade 8, student-led, nonpartisan civics project.

In addition, starting last school year, civics was added to the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System for Grade 8, alongside English language arts, math and science.

In Room J209 at North Andover Middle School, McGravey's students at first glance resemble partners at a junior bridge tournament.

They sit in clusters at desks facing each other and ponder questions on their laptops and the overhead white board related to ancient Greece's influences on the United States.

They are also learning avenues and instruments our democratic republic and its accompanying constitution offer them to effect change and engage in responsible citizenship.

McGravey, a recipient of this year's Edward M.



TIM JEAN/Staff photos

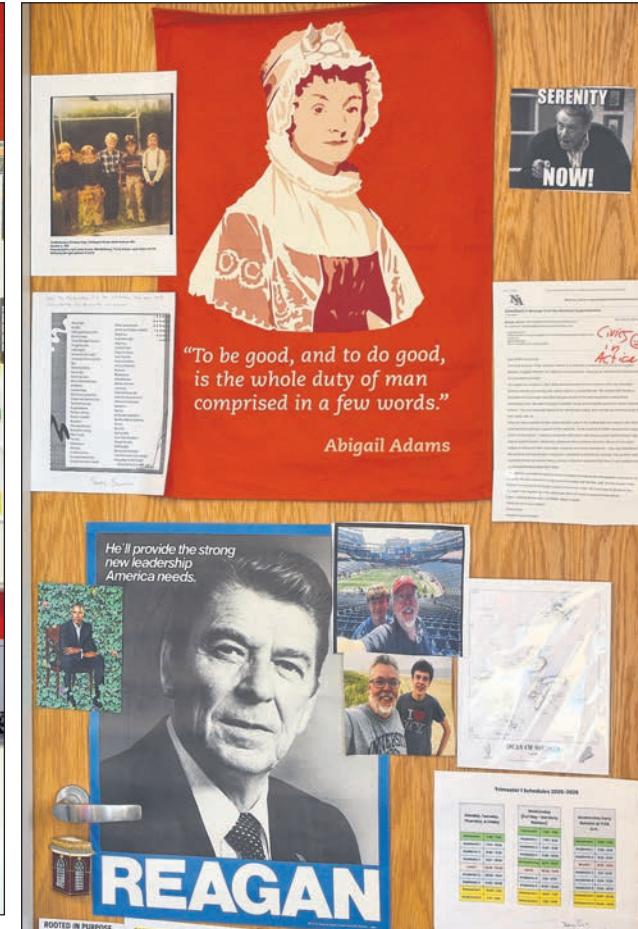
Pat McGravey goes over a lesson in his civics class at North Andover High School.

Kennedy Award for Excellence in Civics Education, sets the classroom tone with self-deprecating humor and energetic civility.

In this unit of study, which will take the class beyond Thanksgiving, the students are exploring the roots of American government.

Grappling with ideas

Students grapple with ideas from ancient Greece, ancient Rome, the Enlightenment, Britain and its Magna Carta and the Native Americans' Iroquois Confederacy, debating which exerted greater influence on the United States.



The walls in Pat McGravey's civics class at North Andover Middle School are covered with historical memorabilia.

Today's lesson delves into ancient Greece's contributions, including voting rights, trial by jury and legislative bodies, as well as its constitution and rule of law.

By the classroom door stands the Wall of Fame, banners bearing the names of former Civics in Action

students.

In keeping with the class's participatory theme, and throwing in a dash of competition, McGravey's students will ultimately select one or another of the five antecedents of American government and make a case for why its influence was

greatest.

The students most successful in their endorsements will be inducted into the class Hall of Fame (modeled on the Rock'n'roll Hall) and see their names posted on a banner.

Meanwhile, these students have thoughts about Greek influences on the U.S., as well as how the class, in general, and its state-required service project, later in the year, will help them pursue meaningful change and their goals.

Student perspectives vary

Christina Castro sees Greek influences in White House architecture.

Tommy Mersereau says the class is teaching him how to advocate for improvements to local soccer fields.

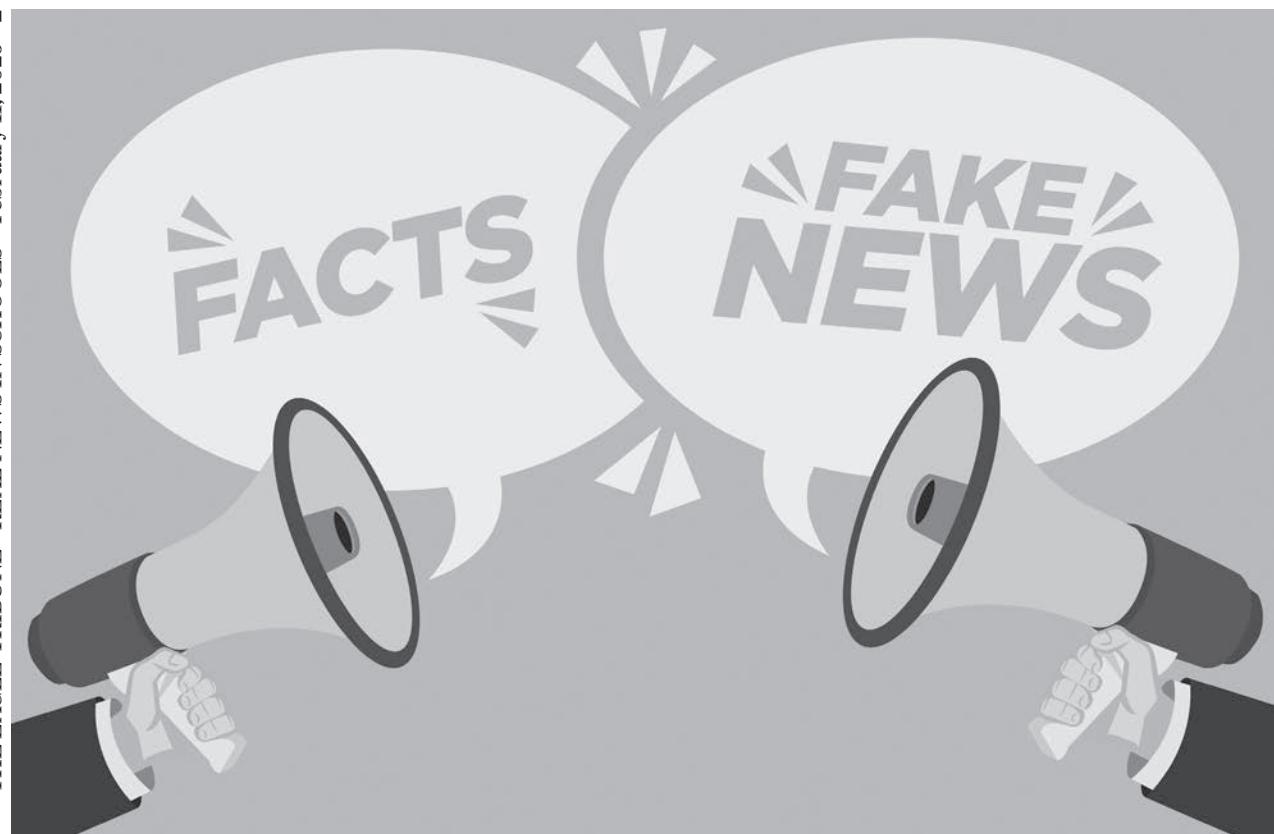
Erin Alden wants to take local action to combat climate change and global warming to protect animals.

Drayden Fitzgerald wants to advocate for legalizing fireworks in Massachusetts.

Henry Dugan will use civics knowledge to communicate with people about local issues like the school budget.

Darshita Joshi, Charlotte Dussaud, Lana Terrio and Jenalyse Chazulle say civics will help them understand the law and regulations and otherwise help them reach career goals.

SEE CIVICS, PAGE 7



Looking to combat fake news?

Here are some resources to help you determine if what you've read is true:

» **Politifact** is the Pulitzer Prize-winning fact checking operation run by the nonprofit Poynter Institute. The site fact-checks statements by politicians and debunks myriad Facebook hoaxes.

<https://www.politifact.com/>

» **FactCheck.org**, run by Annenberg Public Policy Center, performs much of the same tasks, and also lets you ask questions of the fact checkers. An example question: Did the Supreme Court rule that it is illegal to take the oath of office with anything but the Bible? (The answer is no.)

<https://www.factcheck.org/>

» **Snopes** is the original fact-checking website. Use the site's search bar to get to the bottom of political statements, viral videos and urban myths.

<https://www.snopes.com/>

» **A Google reverse image search** is the best way to find out if that photo you saw making the rounds on Twitter or Facebook is real. This story from PC Magazine walks you through how to do it on your desktop or your phone.

<https://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2492468,00.asp>

» **Still need help?** Contact us at the Eagle-Tribune, and we'll get the answer for you, no matter the topic. Email editor Tracey Rauh at trauh@eagletribune.com.



REAL NEWS IN SCHOOLS

How the program works

Your school can have access to local, trusted journalism from The Eagle-Tribune on a daily basis. We report on news throughout the Merrimack Valley and Southern New Hampshire, covering all things local – from schools, to sports, to government, people profiles, business, entertainment and more. You get the facts – the real news – from experienced reporters, photographers and editors you can count on at no cost to your school.

Here are the basics of the program:

What is it? The Eagle-Tribune partners with local businesses to provide free digital access to our newspaper to anyone within the school at no cost to the school. This access encourages students to value the vital news coverage being produced by The Eagle-Tribune. They will build awareness and gain critical thinking skills in the process.

Who can participate?

This program will benefit teachers, students, and the broader school community.

Where does it take place? You can access our newspaper online. Teachers can incorporate the program into their curriculums, even having reporters, photographers and editors visit your class.

When can we start benefiting? As soon as we have your commitment to participate in Real News in Schools we will go to work to find a local business who wants to sponsor you. Once we have one, we will work with your IT Department to get the program up and running.

Why is this valuable? There's a lot of fake news out there on social media and elsewhere. The Eagle-Tribune, founded in 1868 as the Lawrence Daily Eagle and a twice Pulitzer Prize winning publication, has a long track record of fair and accurate reporting that cuts through the misinformation.

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Whittier Tech's English-learners programs evaluated by state

By Jonah Frangiosa

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HAVERHILL — A state review this month examined how Whittier Regional Vocational Technical High School accommodates students who are still learning English outside of their course concentration.

During the week of Feb. 9, Whittier participated in a Tiered Focused Monitoring

Review conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Secondary Education's (DESE) Office of Language Acquisition.

The review is part of DESE's regular oversight of English Learner Education (ELE) programs in schools, supporting students whose first language is not English. The Office of Language Acquisition conducts these reviews for every school district every six years

to ensure schools are complying with state and federal laws and providing appropriate instruction and services to English learners.

Whittier Tech was evaluated on whether or not its English-learning students are being properly identified, placed in the right programs, and given the academic and language support they need to succeed.

DESE looked at a wide

range of areas connected to implementation.

Whittier Tech's ELE program, including student assessment practices, identification of English learners, program placement and services, parent and community engagement, curriculum and instruction, student support services, licensure requirements for faculty, staff, and administrators, and program planning, evaluation, record-keeping, and overall program

The review included a virtual visit and a review of student records. Family outreach was also an "important component of the monitoring process," as Whittier Tech distributed a survey to parents and guardians of students whose records are reviewed.

The survey centered on families' experiences with English learner services, with response reviewed by

the Office of Language Acquisition and considered in the final monitoring report.

Within 60 business days of the review, DESE will issue a report identifying areas where Whittier Tech meets or exceeds regulatory requirements and including any areas that require corrective action or improvement. The final report will be publicly available through DESE at doe.mass.edu/ele/cpr/.

The designers behind the graphics

Exploring the behind the scenes work of Salem HighSchool's graphic design production team

Max Coburn

Salem High School

SALEM N.H. — The Graphic Design Production class has been responsible for Salem High School's graphics for years. From posters to stickers to buttons, as well as designing playbills, graduation covers, and prom tickets, the team communicates with clients all throughout the Salem community to work on anyone's requests.

Salem High School's graphic design Career Technical Education [CTE] courses have two different levels with an introductory course and a production course. The semester-long introductory course gives students a taste of what graphic design is before they sign up for the CTE courses. Furthermore, the Graphic Design Production class is an advanced class and is available to students

once they have completed Graphic and Digital Design 1 with a good enough grade and approval of the instructor. While Graphic and Digital Design 1 and 2 teach students the basics of the various programs they will use throughout the courses, the production class takes a different approach. The production class instructs students on what it would be like having a career in graphic design, teaching experiences that one would learn in a print shop or industry. While graphic design as a whole has many different pathways, the production class focuses strictly on one pathway of traditional print design. The designers use a variety of tools, including cutting knives, large format printers, button machines, and many more, ensuring students have experience in all aspects of graphic design.

The select few students



KRISTEN DEVEAU PHOTO

Production students working on a variety of projects.

work tirelessly together to get through clients' needs. Students begin their class reviewing the queue full of projects. Then, students disperse and do what they are assigned to. Sarah Mitchell, a student in the Graphic Design Production class, says that "A typical day in production class involves a daily stand up at the beginning of class to

update classmates and the teacher on the current status of my project, then the rest of the class period is focused on working towards any goal I would like to reach during that class period." While working towards their goals set at the beginning of class, students work through both digital and physical projects, using a number of techniques to get

their assigned work done. Amelia Marchesi, another Graphic Design Production student, reports, "In production I like working on physical projects more because it's different from GD2 and gives me more of an insight on the hands-on part of graphic design."

In addition to their projects, students in the class also have their own flow to

make sure their assigned projects get done on time. Students are not randomly assigned jobs to do: the Production Design Queue aids students in understanding what they need to do and when they need to get it done. Marchesi shared her opinions on the design queue, saying "Yes, I like the design queue and how projects are assigned because they feel personal to each designer, and it allows for everything to get done without being forgotten about." Once the designers have a grip on all their work, they will need to converse with clients, send emails, and make sure they know what is being requested. While some clients are cooperative and easy to work with, that does not happen all of the time. "Most of the time, the only difficulties I've faced are not having clear instructions/requests when it comes to a client's vision for a project. I just make sure to ask follow up questions and clarify questions when possible," says Mitchell. Having

SEE DESIGNERS, PAGE 6

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From Methuen to Michigan

Fope Ayo takes a shot at Division I basketball

By Kim Tauro

» Student writer

Most basketball players spend years trying to get ahead, trying to be bigger, faster, and more prepared than everyone else around them.

Fope Ayo, a senior captain on the Austin Prep girls basketball team in Reading, Massachusetts, has taken a different path.

Rather than chasing comfort or early dominance, Ayo has repeatedly put herself in situations where she had more to learn than to prove, trusting that growth would come from challenge. And her growth has paid off.

Learning by Stepping In

Ranked No. 1 in Massachusetts from ESPN's 2026 SportsCenter NEXT 100 list, Austin Prep senior captain No. 32 Fope Ayo, a 6-foot-5 center from Methuen and a University of Michigan commit, is preparing to make one of the biggest jumps in basketball. She does so with clear eyes, aware that the advantages that once separated her will no longer be enough.

Ayo recently reached 1,000 career points at Austin Prep and is on pace for 1,000 rebounds, milestones that reflect her size and steady development. She is averaging 22.5 points per game this season, a figure higher than Paige Bueckers averaged during her senior year of high school, when the No. 1 pick in last year's WNBA Draft and one of the league's leading scorer posted 21 points per game.

Ayo's growth did not begin early or follow a traditional path. She was once a swimmer and dancer, and when she first picked up basketball in seventh grade, it was

largely because of her height and encouragement from her father.

Her basketball journey accelerated after joining the Rivals, a club program run by Austin Prep head coach Ushearndra Stroud, known as Coach U. After about a year, Stroud noticed something beyond Ayo's physical tools.

"I told her, 'I want you to come work with these kids. They're older than you, stronger than you, better than you,'" Stroud said. "And I watched her jump in as a 12-year-old with 17- and 18-year-olds who were already headed to high-level college programs and be able to hold her ground."

That willingness to step into harder rooms would become a pattern. In 9th grade, Ayo was playing for Central Catholic, where she didn't get much playing time on varsity. In 10th grade, she transferred to Austin Prep, a completely new environment. Rather than chasing immediate dominance, she worked hard to earn playing time.

From the start, Stroud believed Ayo had the potential to play at the highest levels of college basketball, even envisioning a Big Ten future before she had fallen in love with the sport. That love came later, during the summer before her junior year while competing on the Adidas National Circuit. Facing the top center in the country, Ayo held her own, recording stops and scoring against elite competition.

Now, she is a student of the game.

"College basketball is something you see on TV a lot when you're younger," Ayo said. "And now that's me."



NICOLE RENICK / Austin Prep

Fope Ayo at Austin Prep Media Day

Finding the Game Later and Falling in Love with It

Despite her resume, Ayo approaches the transition to Michigan with humility and perspective. She knows she is leaving a place where she dominated for a program that is deep, fast, and ambitious. At Austin Prep, her height was often an advantage, at Michigan, it will be more common. As a captain

at Austin Prep, Ayo was an experienced leader; at Michigan, she will be a freshman competing against older, more seasoned players – many on the path to becoming WNBA draft picks – forcing her to rely on more than just her size.

"It's a good nervous," Ayo said. "Because now I have the opportunity to prove myself and to learn, get

better, and develop."

Michigan, under head coach Kim Barnes Arico, the winningest coach in program history, has emerged as one of the nation's most consistent programs over the past decade, regularly reaching the NCAA Tournament and pushing toward the next tier of women's college basketball, a challenge that mirrors Ayo's own

trajectory.

Coach U believes Ayo's basketball IQ will be her greatest asset. "She has grown so much as a facilitator," Stroud said. "She reads where defensive help is coming from and makes the right pass. I trust her IQ the most."

Those traits are rooted in

SEE AYO, PAGE 6



BRENDAN CARPENTER/Austin Prep
Fope Ayo at the free-throw line as she scores her 1,000th career high school point for Austin Prep.

» Ayo

Continued from Page 5

Ayo's mindset. Though often perceived as calm and confident, she does not see herself as a finished product. "Even with all these amazing things I'm thankful for, in my head I still think I haven't been playing basketball for that long," she said.

That perspective shapes how she leads. As a captain at Austin Prep, Ayo mentors younger players, remembering what it felt like to learn the game later. Off the court, she serves as the senior class public relations officer, modeling leadership beyond athletics.

"She leads with her faith," Stroud said. "She's heart-first, compassionate, and competitive that fits with what Michigan is building."

Faith and values guided Ayo's college decision. When it came time to commit, she prayed extensively and carefully weighed basketball, academics, relationships, and fit. After a final conversation with Barnes Arico, she knew Michigan was home. While transferring has become common

in college sports, Ayo approached her choice as a true four-year commitment.

Plus, with NIL now part of the landscape, Ayo is navigating a new dimension of college athletics, approaching name, image, and likeness opportunities with the same discipline and perspective she brings to the game. Notably, she built her reputation without a significant social media presence, keeping her focus on substance over spotlight. Looking ahead, Ayo keeps her future open. She hopes to play professionally, but is also interested in paths beyond basketball, including law, diplomacy, or intelligence work.

A New Beginning at the Next Level

At Michigan, Fope Ayo will not be the biggest name or the most experienced player. What she brings instead is something harder to teach: a willingness to learn, adapt, and embrace discomfort. It is the same choice she has made all along, and it is the reason her story continues to unfold.

Kim Tauro is a sophomore at Austin Prep

Haverhill JROTC stands tall

HAVERHILL — Students from Haverhill High School's JROTC Marine Corps program were front and center at the fall benefit sponsored by The

Marine Corps League Detachment 128 of Haverhill, along with the Lawrence Ladies' Lodge #2026 Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America and the

AmVets Post 147.

The annual pasta and meatball dinner at the Haverhill Mayor AmVets Hall in Haverhill sold out, attracting more than 200 people, and attended to show her

helping raise money for the JROTC program.

Haverhill Mayor Melinda Barrett also attended to show her support.



Aliza Rodriguez, Haverhill High School sophomore and JROTC cadet, presents a raffle basket to winner, Tracy Hatch of Haverhill.



Haverhill high sophomore Natalie Guice, a JROTC cadet and Haverhill high senior, Kenny Monterio, JROTC Marine Corps commanding officer, help themselves to the pasta dinner.



Haverhill High JROTC Marine Corps color guard present the colors for the national anthem to open the fall fundraise. From left, sophomore and Staff Sgt., Madison Roosevelt; sophomore and Staff Sgt. Katelynn Hannon; sophomore and corporal, Ashley McGrath and junior and 2nd Lt. Milly Diaz.

» Designers

Continued from Page 3

a clear understanding of the project and ensuring the client's needs will be met goes hand in hand with the physical work done by the designers. In doing so, this makes sure a positive bond is built between designers and clients and everything is able to get done before

the deadline.

Graphic Design is more than just drawing pictures, it's about building a relationship between clients, creating dreams, and making sure the environment is decorated with visually pleasing pieces of art. Whether that art be a sign, poster, digital advertisement, or anything else, every design plays a

key role in enhancing the school environment. While the designers are doing what they love in helping others, the class not only allows students to get a further education of graphic design, it allows the designers' skills to be amplified to a level ready for careers. Amelia Marchesi says "The production class has improved my skills as a

designer by teaching me how to interact with clients and how to physically create projects with different supplies and printers." Students are not just creating various works of art, they are building their future, project by project.

Max Coburn writes for The Devil's Details, the Salem High School student newspaper.

Continued from Page 1

Paige Lucci says the participatory class builds confidence she'll draw on in musical theatre performances.

Lucille Kamau enjoys sharpening her debating skills.

Visit planned to Kennedy Institute

This school year all 8th graders at North Andover Middle School will visit a replica of the U.S. Senate chamber at the Edward M. Kennedy Institute in Boston.

There, on the UMass Boston campus, next to the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, students will debate and vote as if they were lawmakers, using exhibits and interacting with staff to learn how policy ideas move through Congress and laws are passed.

McGravey says the visit is civics in action. The students get to experience lawmaking and debate, first-hand.

He recognizes the big tent of ideas circulating in our society and remains committed to the Civics Education Law's requirement that content meet curriculum frameworks set by the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and that he not advocate for a political party or point of view.

He has consulted with parents on class activities and keeps them informed on what the class will be studying, he says.

McGravey takes a non-traditional approach to civics, largely paperless and relying on multi-media files, writing and discussion as opposed to traditional textbook based teaching.

On a shelf by the windows in his classroom is a bobblehead Thomas Jefferson resting his neck among collectibles and framed photos.

Looking out from a poster on the back wall is a converted periodic table,



TIM JEAN/Staff photos

Engagement is the rule as McGravey goes over a lesson.



The bulletin board in Pat McGravey's civics class.

listing, instead of chemical elements, amendments to the U.S. Constitution. It posts the Bill of Rights, the changes every bit as powerful to American life as the reactions caused by chemical bonds.

Lawmakers make visits

McGravey regularly invites North Andover or state officials and those who hold elected office to visit his classes to present their duties and responsibilities and field questions.

Janice Phillips is a parent

and North Andover Select Board member as well as an aide to state Sen. Barry Finegold (D-2nd Essex and Middlesex). She has visited the class with other local officials.

"We talk about the general form of government that we have in North Andover, that we're run by town meeting, which means every registered voter has a say in what happens in this town," she said in an interview. "And that's pretty unique, especially for a town of this size."

State Rep. Andy Vargas, D-Haverhill, has visited McGravey's classes numerous times over the years. The 32-year-old was just 16 and a junior at Haverhill High School when he and other students in Gateway Cities proposed making civics an integral part of school curriculum.

After Vargas was elected to the state House in 2017 he rallied colleagues to pass the Civics in Education law. On his visits to McGravey's classes Vargas has seen

students get excited over ideas big and small, from school funding to improving school lunch nutrition.

He says McGravey encourages the kids to think about issues that matter to them.

"It was impressive to see that, you know, in his classroom, they were really taking the spirit of the law to heart, and trying to figure out how students can play an active role in our democracy right now and not waiting until they're adults," the state representative said.

Test results show need

There is work to be done, if state testing is a guide. Statewide in 2025 students scored at about 39% proficiency in MCAS civics.

"Our kids (all NAMS 8th graders including students of two other teachers) were at 59%, almost 60% proficiency," McGravey said.

He acknowledges the level isn't excellent but this was the first year the civics test was administered.

Regarding the student-led civics project, 8th graders carry out a follow-up project when they get to high school.

Several former students of McGravey's are now at North Andover High School and remain engaged in ideas first kindled in their 8th grade civics class. Among them are Keshav Mahadevan, Mariah Eskel, Mehak Sankhla, Parker Dubman and Sreejith Krishna.

Parker and Sreejith successfully advocated for the end of the High School MCAS graduation requirement in Massachusetts by gathering data from teachers and students before the ballot question initiative in the fall of 2024.

They were later asked to testify with McGravey on Beacon Hill at a hearing in support of more funding for civic education in Massachusetts in March of 2025.

Policy changed by advocacy

Mehak's student-led civics project in 8th grade advocated for excused absences and deadline extensions on assignments for students

observing diverse religious holidays.

She pursued this project after she was denied an extension on a homework assignment to allow her to celebrate Diwali, a major Indian festival, with her family.

As a result of Mehak's advocacy, North Andover school policy now allows for excused absences based on religious holidays beyond Christian and Jewish observances. A similar statewide policy is now under consideration in a bill filed by state Sen. Bruce Tarr, R-Gloucester.

McGravey, who has been teaching at the middle school for nearly 30 years, has seen student engagement climb through the Civics in Action class.

He was a student at the school and remembers having to memorize the preamble to the Constitution.

He attended Central Catholic High School in Lawrence, where he first became excited by history and politics in a U.S. Government class taught by Leo McCue, also McGravey's cross-country coach.

Lessons of the past

McCue had his class follow the 1988 presidential race between Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Michael Dukakis, and the class studied and watched a video of the 1960 presidential debate between John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon.

McGravey's role today is to create in his students the same fascination and excitement for learning he experienced in his mentor's class all those years ago.

The civics enthusiast is one of only 50 middle school and high school civics, history and social studies teachers from across the country chosen to attend the "Teaching 250" convention in Philadelphia in February, named for the nation's semi-quicentennial.

While there he hopes to discover new resources for helping students discover civics in action.



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