# *From the Guidance Corner, by Catherine Lallas, Center School Guidance Counselor*

# Tips for Sailing Through the MCAS Testing

* *Get a good night’s sleep*, so you feel well rested on the days of testing (better yet, for two nights before). Stay away from colas and desserts to *avoid caffeine* which will make it hard to fall asleep.
* *Plan ahead for a calm morning* on the days of testing (and honestly, this helps all year long!). The night before: lay out clothes, pack lunches and snacks (don’t forget water), pack your backpack with food, homework/books/instruments/sport gear so you are not running around trying to find your belongings at the last minute.
* *Feed your brain in the morning!* For optimal performance, your brain would like some protein to get it up and running. Some breakfast ideas: any kind of eggs, Canadian bacon, turkey sausages, yogurt smoothies, ham and melted cheese on an English muffin, cottage cheese and fresh berries or (even if you’re picky) a tall glass of chocolate or vanilla soy milk.
* *Leave for school a few minutes earlier than usual so you are not rushing or worrying about being late.* If you can and the weather is cooperative, walk to school. Your brain will love the fresh air, and will stay alert longer after you’ve arrived at school.
* *During the testing, focus on staying calm, relaxed and positive!* No negative self-talk! Keep an optimistic and cheerful attitude. Say things to yourself like: “I know this – I’ve practiced this and I know how to do it – I am a good student – I can do my best – I’m learning more each day – My mind is clear and alert – I can do this.” If you begin to feel tense, use a slow, deep breathing exercise to calm yourself.
* *Do not spend too much time on any one question.* Skip the harder ones and go back to them later as your confidence builds. Many students do well by starting with the easiest questions first and then working their way on to the more difficult ones as their confidence level increases.
* *Go back and proofread.* After finishing the test, go back and look over your answers. Does the answer make sense? Have you answered all the parts of the questions? Are the answers in the right place?
* *Use as much time as you need to finish the test.* Do not allow those who finish early bother you. They often are not the ones who do best.
* *When you are finished reward yourself for a job well done!*

**Relaxation Exercises**

* **The Big Sponge:** Imagine that you are a sponge. To squeeze out all the stress and tension, tighten all your muscles (without hurting yourself) and silently count to five. Then relax all your muscles for a count of five. Repeat this 4-5 times. As you tense and relax your muscles you will ring out more stress.
* **Lemon Squeezing:** Imagine that you are making lemonade by squeezing out fresh lemons. You can use a couple of stress balls or imaginary lemons and tightly squeeze both fists. Squeeze to a count of three or so and then stretch and relax your hands for five seconds. As you squeeze your fists tightly again, imagine that the lemon juice is dripping out and taking all your tension with it. Repeat several times.
* **The Big Balloon:** Imagine that your stomach is a balloon. Breathe in slowly through your nose and watch your stomach (balloon) expand. Hold that breath for the count of three, then breath out slowly through your mouth. Do this several times and watch your tension blow away.
* **One Minute Vacation:** Give your self a minute or two to daydream a bit. Imagine a quiet place you like to be that is relaxing and enjoyable. Some examples might be playing at the beach, walking in the woods, relaxing in a hammock. Pretend you are there and imagine what it looks like, smells like, feels like and sounds like. Enjoy a few moments there before returning to the classroom.
* **Sit Tight:** Sit at your desk and put your feet flat on the floor. With your hands, grab underneath your chair on the sides. Push down with your feet and pull up on your chair at the same time for a slow count of five seconds. Then relax for 5-10 seconds. Repeat three or four times.
* **Yoga Breathing:** stand with your feet slightly apart. Let your arms hang loosely at your sides. As you inhale, raise your arms slowly out to the sides, palms up and over your head. Exhaling, clasp you fingers and turn your palms up toward the ceiling. Now inhale slowly again, stretching up and tilting your head slightly back. As you exhale, drop you head down to your chest and let your arm slowly return to your sides. Repeat several times.
* **Power Breathing:** Take a deep breath in through your nose. Hold it for 3 seconds and imagine pushing that breath into the extremities of your body, such as to your hand, feet and head. Slowly breathe out through your mouth. Repeat a few times, smoothing out the inhalation and the exhalation so there is seamless inflow and outflow of air. As you breathe in feel calm energy entering your body and as you breathe out feel the tension flowing out of your body.

***References:***

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