ASK BYFS
Your Child's MCAS Test Anxiety

Parent Question: How can I best prepare my child for MCAS exams?

As children begin to hear about MCAS testing they may start to become worried or feel pressure. As most of you probably know, the testing starts in the 3rd grade and eventually can become a barrier to graduating high school if the 10th grade scores are not met at a certain level. Imagine anticipating MCAS as a 3rd grader, and you might begin to feel pressure to the point where you might have a stomach ache, not be hungry, not want to go to school or even talk to your parent or the school counselor about what is going on.

The test may create an aura of fear for some children. Though the school tries to position the test as more of an assessment of the schools' performance rather than the child's, students do get stressed. Unlike other tests children take at this stage, the MCAS requires that they answer open-ended questions which can further exacerbate test taking anxiety or performance anxiety. No matter how calm or reassuring you are as a parent, the culture around MCAS may cause anxiety. If your child is nervous, he or she might not be able to exhibit their skills and learning in the most advantageous way.

Several schools, i.e., Hanover, MA and Milford, MA., have published guides for parents to provide support and some list ways to reduce anxiety. These include:

- talking about the test in positive ways
-encouraging best efforts
-encouraging focus on strengths
-reinforcing that the test as only one measure of learning and more a guide for the school
-enhancing confidence and motivation through positive reinforcement
-ensuring adequate sleep, physical exercise, and a healthy diet

Some school districts on the Cape use a company called Study Island that offers practice MCAS tests on line. Children get to see the type of questions on the test and see that the questions reinforce what is learned in the classroom. Services like this can be helpful as long as they remain fun and do not increase the anxiety associated with taking the test, which is a risk.

Some parents may want to plan some fun activities or favorite meals the days before the test to increase a relaxed, easy going state of mind. Just talking

to your child and being able to listen to any concerns or worries they might have could be enough.

For more information about supporting your child through the MCAS process check out Parents Place Pointers at www.pplace.org

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