

Counseling Communiqué

Acton-Boxborough Regional High School Counseling Department
<http://ab.mec.edu/abrhs/counseling/index/shtml>

Get Your Sleep

As we begin a new year, many of us are busy making resolutions to improve our lives. In light of Festival of Sleep Day (recognized by some on January 3rd), it is a good time to reflect on the value of a good night's sleep. Sleep is a vital part of maintaining continued academic success for our students and good health for us all. The 2006 Emerson Hospital Youth Risk Behavior Survey revealed that Acton-Boxborough students self-reported that they are regularly getting an insufficient amount of sleep.

Chronic sleep deprivation is linked to a wide variety of detrimental health conditions including weight gain, poor cardiovascular health and decreased immune system function. Additionally, studies have shown that those who slept after learning new material performed better on related tests later than those who did not (Harvard Women's Health Watch). Regular sleep deprivation also leads to irritability, moodiness and an inability to concentrate which can adversely affect both our interpersonal relationships and our ability to learn in school or perform well at work.

On average, adults need about eight hours of sleep per night. Contrary to popular belief, adolescents over the age of 15 require more sleep than when they were younger. Two-thirds of Acton-Boxborough High School students reported (via the Youth Risk Behavior Survey) getting "seven or fewer hours of sleep each night on average...and the incidence of this behavior increased each year by grade". Why is this happening? There are a variety of physical and psychiatric conditions as well as some medications that can cause sleep disruptions. Additionally, research has shown that watching TV is linked with poor sleep habits and using electronic media (video games, internet, etc.) before bed can negatively affect the quality of sleep that we get at night. However, the American Psychological Association indicates that **stress** is the primary cause of sleep disruptions.

Luckily, there are some simple ways to improve the quality and quantity of sleep that we get on a regular basis. Given the importance of sleep to wellbeing, perhaps we can try to make sleep more of a priority in 2009.

1. Minimize the use of the snooze button. Continually hitting snooze interrupts our restorative REM sleep when memory consolidation occurs and enables us to effectively learn new material.
2. Keep regular sleep and wake schedules.
3. Avoid caffeine 4-6 hours before bedtime.
4. Don't smoke.
5. Avoid heavy meals before sleep.
6. Get regular exercise.
7. Minimize noise, light and extreme temperatures in your bedroom.
8. Attempt gradually going to bed earlier each night in order to ensure you are getting enough sleep.

References:

- 2006 Emerson Hospital Youth Risk Behavior Survey
- <http://www.apa.org/topics/whysleep.html>
- http://www.health.harvard.edu/press_releases/importance_of_sleep_and_health.htm

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Dates of Interest January

- 5 School opens
- 9 Volunteer Opportunities Fair during all lunches
- 19 Martin Luther King Day—no school
- 19 Community Service Awards Night-7 P.M.
- 23 Term 2 ends
- 24 SATs administered



Coming in February

- 4 Report Card distribution
- 7 ACT administered
- 16-20

Winter Recess





College Admissions Testing

SAT Registration Update

- Registration online at www.collegeboard.com gives you immediate test center assignment and confirmation. Starting in May, you can register online for tests to be given the following year. Create a “My Organizer” account with the College Board and get a free “My Road” account if you took PSATs. As in Naviance you will be able to explore majors/careers and search for colleges.
- Paper registration forms are available in the Counseling Center.
- Pre-registering by telephone is convenient and available if you’ve registered previously. Call 866-756-7346.



ACT and SAT: What is the Difference?

No part of the college application process seems to be more intimidating than taking the ACT (American College Testing) or the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Tests). The first thing to know is that the ACT and the SAT are different tests. They are developed and administered by different companies, they test different areas of knowledge, and they are scored differently.

The ACT is administered by the American College Testing Program. It tests four areas of knowledge: English, (including writing), math, reading, and science reasoning. Each area is scored separately on a scale of 1 to 36, and a composite score is also given. Guessing at an answer on the ACT and being incorrect will **not** lower the overall score.

The SAT is administered by the College Entrance Examination Board. It tests math, verbal and writing skills, and each section is scored on a scale of 200 to 800. Some sections of the SAT math test require a calculator. Guessing at an answer on the SAT and being incorrect will deduct points from the overall score.

Students should first find out which tests are required by individual schools. The ACT is more commonly used in the Midwest, while the SAT is common on the coasts. **Most institutions will accept both**, however, and when both are taken, most schools will use the highest score when evaluating the application. Many schools will accept the ACT in lieu of the SAT and SAT Subject Tests. Some colleges do not require either the SAT or ACT.

It is recommended that students take standardized tests twice, once in the junior year and again in the senior year. The first attempt frequently disappoints students, and to some extent, a low score can be blamed on the unfamiliarity of taking a three-hour standardized test. Students are generally less anxious the second time they take the tests. Do not rely on taking standardized tests over and over to improve the score, however. Statistics show that most scores do not change drastically over three or more test attempts. Instead, take and score practice tests several times before taking the actual test. For more information, see the testing handout mailed with the PSAT results, copies of which are available in the Counseling Center.



When to take the SAT Subject Tests



The SAT Subject Tests are one-hour tests in specific subject areas used by many colleges for admissions and/or placement. Like the SAT, the SAT Subject Tests are part of the College Board testing program. Colleges which use these tests in the admissions process require various combinations (i.e., three tests of your choice or three including one math and one science). Students can check online to see what tests a college requires.

The SAT Subject Tests are administered on most of the SAT testing dates, but a student may not take both the SAT and SAT Subject Tests on the same day; however, students may register to take three of the one hour subject tests on the same date. Students taking the SAT Subject Tests who are considering applying to a college under an early decision plan, or who are candidates for one of the military academies or for ROTC scholarships should plan to take three subject tests in May and/or June of their junior year. Students who are finishing a course of study, such as U.S. history or a foreign language, might want to consider taking the Subject Tests at the end of this academic year. Some students take their Subject Tests in the fall of their senior year after they have arrived at a list of colleges to which they plan to apply, but in some cases taking the Subject Tests earlier than senior year may be advisable.

College Admissions Testing (continued)



When to take the SAT Subject Tests (continued)

A few sophomores and freshmen have, in the past, taken the biology or chemistry tests at the completion of these courses and have done quite well on them. Any students who are doing well in these classes may want to talk with their teachers and counselors about the advisability of taking a test this year. Students should pick up a copy of *Taking the SAT Subject Tests* in the Counseling Center or access this on the College Board web site for more information on this part of the testing process.

Preparing for the SAT/ACT

Standardized tests can be intimidating. And all the hype about test scores doesn't help. By the time you finish talking to your friends and reading about the tests, it may feel like those little ovals will determine your future.



True, test scores are important. But they're not nearly as important as many students think. Different colleges use test scores differently, but no colleges make admission decisions based solely on test scores. In fact, your academic record—the courses you've taken and the grades you've received—is looked at much more closely than your test scores.

A Proven Way to Boost Your Score!

There's no way to get around it—the best ways to prepare for the SAT or ACT are to study hard and read as much as you can.

The testing companies themselves agree. "The best preparation is to take challenging courses in high school," says Kristin Crouse from ACT. "That prepares students best for college, and that's what the ACT measures." High school social studies and English courses help students learn to read critically, to write well-written essays, and to develop a broad vocabulary. Math and science courses help students develop problem solving and quantitative reasoning skills. All of these skills are important to success in a college program and are measured in some way by the standardized tests.

Visit the SAT Preparation Center on the College Board web site where you will find practice tests and other useful hints.

Reading is another great way to prepare. No, you don't have to plow through *Moby Dick* (although that wouldn't hurt!). Choose books, magazines, and newspapers that you enjoy—everything from *Twilight* to the *New York Times* can strengthen your reading comprehension and vocabulary.



Unfortunately, there is no quick way to make up for taking easy classes and avoiding the library. But you can make the commitment now to read for at least 15 minutes a day. By the time the next testing date comes up, you'll feel more prepared.

Deadlines for Transcripts

Requests for transcripts for those applications with a deadline of February 1st need to be in the Counseling Center by the close of school on January 9th, and for those applications with a deadline of February 15th, requests for transcripts need to be submitted by the close of school on January 26th.



Bulletin Board

FAFSA Day in Massachusetts

Complete your FAFSA! College Goal Sunday is a non-profit program that provides free information and assistance to Massachusetts families applying for financial assistance for higher education. This statewide program is administered by the Massachusetts Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. The state's fifth College Goal Sunday will take place on January 25th at 2:00 P.M. Anyone interested in learning more about College Goal Sunday may call 877/4-CGS-MAS or visit online at www.masscollegegoalsunday.org.

Attention: Sophomores

Counselors will be meeting in small groups with their sophomore students in early February to discuss career exploration and future planning. At this time they will receive their Family Connection account. More information on this will follow in the February edition of the Counseling Communiqué.



Community Service during January

A variety of activities will focus school attention on community service during January. On January 9th there will be a Volunteer Opportunities Fair during all lunches. Students can find out about community service activities, some of which are school year activities and some are summer opportunities. A set of projects called the Martin Luther Service Initiative will take place during January, February and March.

On January 19th, the school will hold its eighth annual Community Service Awards Night in the auditorium at 7:00 P.M. At this event students will receive Community Service awards, and several students will speak about their experiences. The Youth in Philanthropy group will present checks to agencies which applied for and received grants through this program.

Anyone interested in more information about these activities can contact Kay Steeves at 978-264-4700, ext. 3444 or ksteeves@mail.ab.mec.edu.



Mid-Year Exams

Mid-Year exams for math and science classes are scheduled for January 15th and 16th. The three days prior (January 12-14) will be devoted to mid-year review in these classes. All other classes will not assign assessments on January 14, 15 or 16th so that students may focus their attention on these exams. No homework exceeding 20 minutes per class will be given the days of, or the day before an exam and 20 minutes of homework may only be assigned if it directly applies to the aiding in studying for a midyear exam. Students enrolled in multiple math or science classes are encouraged to speak with their teachers directly if they have concerns about the exam schedule.

2nd Semester Schedule Pick-up

The first day of the new term is Monday, January 26th. Semester II schedules will be available in the Counseling Center starting on Wednesday, January 21st.



