

MCAS ELA Grade 10 Practice Test

“When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom” and “Instead of Detention”

Argument Student Work Samples and Annotations

Question 18

Idea Development – Score Point 5

This essay presents a fully developed argument in favor of adopting mindfulness techniques in schools. Details from both articles are skillfully selected to provide the reader with a rich understanding of why teaching and practicing mindfulness can benefit both students and teachers. An effective introduction states a claim and establishes the logical basis for the argument: “It is clear, based on the two articles, that training teachers in the practice of mindfulness would be extremely beneficial to school districts such as our own.” The first body paragraph discusses the link between stress and “negative psychological and neurological effects” and introduces scientific findings to support this idea: “A study published by JAMA Internal Medicine explains that mindfulness helps with processing potential stressors.” Successive paragraphs build on the argument with insightful references to the articles, establishing that mindfulness allows students to “learn self-control and better study habits by applying the methods of mindfulness that help them understand themselves.” Subtle and clear organization moves the essay purposefully through the positive effects on students as well as teachers, and by extension, the larger community. Evidence of how mindfulness has benefited students and teachers in the two schools cited in the articles is effectively used to support the student’s argument for training teachers in mindfulness: “...teachers can educate without having a disruptive class and distracted students. It also guides teachers to become better educators as they learn more about their students.” The final paragraph of this six-paragraph essay circles back to the broader argument that the use of mindfulness techniques would “by extension create a healthier and more productive learning environment.” The writer demonstrates full awareness of the writing task and argument mode, and use of rich language adds strength to the overall argument.

Standard English Conventions – Score Point 3

The essay demonstrates consistent control of a variety of sentence structures, grammar, usage, and mechanics. Well-formed sentences support fluency of ideas and overall clarity: “Our district is continually looking for ways to improve student outcomes and create a more collaborative and inclusive culture, and adding mindfulness techniques into the curriculum would help us achieve these goals.” Word choices such as “inclusive,” “wallow,” and “positive sphere” demonstrate the use and control of rich language. Minor errors do not detract from the overall control of conventions.

Student Work Sample

Mindfulness. It is a technique of deep thinking and breathing that allows people to calm themselves and reflect. This concept goes back millennia, finding roots in the yoga practices that are now common worldwide. It offers a chance for people to cope with their problems, whether it be mental health issues or something as simple as a test that someone is stressed about. Mindfulness seems to offer a solution to common problems that affect learning. It is clear, based on the two articles, that training teachers in the practice of mindfulness would be extremely beneficial to school districts such as our own. Our district is continually looking for ways to improve student outcomes and create a more collaborative and inclusive culture, and adding mindfulness techniques into the curriculum would help us achieve these goals.

Mindfulness has been widely documented as helpful to the brain. The idea that there is a “connection between emotional imbalance and poor life prospects” only adds to this idea. Stress can lead to many negative psychological and neurological effects. A study published by JAMA Internal Medicine explains that mindfulness helps with processing potential stressors that could lead to worse effects. Mindfulness techniques allow students to pay attention to what is important rather than being forced to wallow in their problems. It also calms students so they can focus on their problems in a positive way and make self-informed, thoughtful decisions on how to respond.

Teachers in districts such as ours often serve not only as educators but also as therapists to students that need help. This idea is echoed by a clinical social worker at the Arturo A. Schomburg Satellite Academy, mentioned in "When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom." This "transfer school" is designed to help students who have dropped out or fallen behind, but who have a passion to learn. Their teachers are the ones who are always there, day in and day out, seeing how their students act. They have seen how mindfulness helps students develop. Students learn self-control and better study habits by applying the methods of mindfulness that help them understand themselves. Robert W Coleman Elementary School, mentioned in "Instead of Detention," employs mindfulness as a way for disruptive students to cope with their feelings before going back to class. As an alternative to detention, it allows children to build an ability to be mindful and calm. The students at the school struggle with mental health, difficult living situations as well as being categorized as disorderly or disruptive, similar to the students at Arturo A. Schomburg Satellite Academy. Some of the students in our district grapple with similar issues and teachers/ administrators have been looking for new ways to help minimize disruptions in class.

The students at Robert W. Coleman go to a "Mindful Moment Room" in order to calm down. The school also provides yoga before and after school as well as fifteen minutes of mindfulness at the start and end of each day. It allows students to calm down and focus during their day. Doing it in school allows kids to take a moment in their day to focus on their problems before they are swept into the rush of life again. Students who go through mindfulness end up being less disruptive, with Robert W. Coleman seeing zero suspensions compared to four in the past year. It also sees students returning to their classrooms calm and ready to learn. With these types of proven results, a system such as this is worth implementing in our schools. The students in Argos Gonzalez's class at Schomburg Satellite Academy have five minutes of mindfulness at the start of class. It primes them for a class filled with education rather than distracting them from their learning. Gonzalez has been trained in mindfulness and serves as a friend, mentor, teacher and therapist to the students. He is best fit to guide his students through mindfulness and has improved as a teacher by applying mindfulness in his own life.

Teachers are in a prime position to help students. Evidenced by the examples of Robert W. Coleman elementary school and the Arturo Schomburg Satellite Academy, mindfulness has a positive effect on students' lives and allows them to focus on their work. This focus creates a positive sphere in the classroom and allows teachers to educate their students with minimal distractions. Mindfulness doesn't only benefit the students. With it, teachers can educate without having a disruptive class and distracted students. It also guides teachers to become better educators as they learn more about their students. Additionally, rather than valuing cognitive learning more than non-cognitive intelligence, mindfulness stresses the emotional needs of students. The roots of problems are better addressed, and students are more likely to attain a full and meaningful education.

As noted in Mindfulness Meets the Classroom, non-cognitive intelligence can be "the foundation of good character, resilience, and long-term life fulfillment." Though less obvious than other measures of a good education, the elements of emotional intelligence are important and must be taught. It is clear that piloting a program that would create a block of time during the week for practicing mindfulness techniques would benefit students and faculty members in our town, and by extension create a healthier and more productive learning environment.

Idea Development – Score Point 4

The central idea of the argument presented in this essay is clear and well developed. Various positive outcomes of mindfulness are presented in the introduction to establish the claim that mindfulness “could be incredibly beneficial to schools around the country and the world.” This claim is supported with information from both articles, as experiences from two schools are smoothly and thoughtfully cited: in one school, “New York City transfer school English teacher Argos Gonzalez employs simple 5 minute mindfulness exercises . . . [,]increasing the students’ abilities to focus.” In another school, “mindfulness exercises are used in place of a child being sent to the principal’s office to deal with disciplinary issues.” The writer effectively presents a counterclaim in the second body paragraph: “Though some argue that helping children deal with these issues during the school day blurs the line between teacher and therapist, others point out that it is a teacher’s job to prepare students for life as an adult after their education, which should include not just academic learning, but also mental and emotional well-being.” The final paragraph of this four-paragraph essay revisits the broader argument and picks out effective examples that were discussed earlier in the essay: “Whether it is sleep benefits, better mental or emotional well-being, or simply increased focus on schoolwork, the positive effects of these techniques on the students were widespread and profound.” Organization is clear and ideas are well explained, showing full awareness of task and argument mode of writing.

Standard English Conventions – Score Point 3

Sentence forms are varied and controlled. Overall, correctness of sentences, grammar and usage, and mechanics supports fluency and clarity. This is shown in sentences throughout the essay, such as: “This movement is one that could be incredibly beneficial to schools around the country and the world as it uses techniques that can improve the learning environment in a school setting, increase the mental and emotional health of students, and equip children with tools that will help them for the rest of their lives.” Effective language choices, such as “prestigious” and “profound,” are used correctly and contribute to the overall control of spelling and word choice. Minor errors do not detract from the overall control of conventions.

Student Work Sample

In the contrasting settings of a high school in a poor district of New York City, a prestigious private school in Massachusetts, and a West Baltimore elementary school, evidence of the increasing popularity of the practice of mindfulness and meditation in the classroom is present throughout the school day. Students at these schools are encouraged to use different techniques such as breathing exercises, yoga, and other activities designed to stimulate emotional awareness for a variety of purposes throughout their days, including ways to destress, to deal with disciplinary problems or break up arguments, or simply as a way to focus their minds on schoolwork when it is necessary. This movement is one that could be incredibly beneficial to schools around the country and the world as it uses techniques that can improve the learning environment in a school setting, increase the mental and emotional health of students, and equip children with tools that will help them for the rest of their lives.

Mindfulness and meditational practices help improve the learning environment in the classroom because it helps students to focus on the task at hand. New York City transfer school English teacher Argos Gonzalez employs simple 5 minute mindfulness exercises to begin each class session, saying “It’s just a way to focus [your] mind’ . . . he uses [these techniques] to help train their attention, quiet their thoughts, and regulate their emotions”. In this way, he is increasing the

students' abilities to focus and making them more capable to efficiently and successfully complete their schoolwork. In a Baltimore elementary school, mindfulness exercises are used in place of a child being sent to the principal's office to deal with disciplinary issues. After putting the mindfulness program in place, Principal Carlillian Thompson says there have been far fewer referrals to the office of an administrator and zero suspensions to the previous term's four. "'When the kids come down [to the meditation room], they're all rowdy and goofing around,' said [third grader Dacari Crawford]. 'When they leave the room, they're peaceful and quiet and ready to do their work'".

Mindfulness practices in the classroom also improve ability to cope with mental, emotional, and social problems in and outside of school. Many of the students in Gonzalez's New York City transfer school as well as Thompson's Baltimore elementary school live in the poorest districts of each respective city and deal with very serious problems in their lives outside of school. Though some argue that helping children deal with these issues during the school day blurs the line between teacher and therapist, others point out that it is a teacher's job to prepare students for life as an adult after their education, which should include not just academic learning, but also mental and emotional well-being. Gonzalez "also thinks mindfulness helps him to . . . give [the students] the skills to help themselves, rather than feeling that he needs to be the one to heal them", showing how valuable the practice of mindfulness can be.

The articles "When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom" and "instead of Detention, These Students Get Meditation" show the healthy effects on students of the practices of mindfulness and meditation throughout the school day. Whether it is sleep benefits, better mental and emotional well-being, or simply increased focus on schoolwork in the classroom, the positive effects of these techniques on the students were widespread and profound.

Idea Development – Score Point 3

This essay is moderately developed. The writer begins by stating that mindfulness “is an [up-and – coming] technique that is being used by students to help them focus their mind and become aware of their emotional state” and introduces a general claim that “schools have adopted this method and have significant improvement in the [students’] behavior and academic performance.” Support for this claim is provided through information that is either quoted or paraphrased from the articles, such as “mindfulness creates a space where the children are able to make better decisions and reflect on their character.” There is some evidence taken from each article, but the evidence is fairly brief and not well explained or expanded upon. Organization is moderate and based primarily upon each of the two schools described in the articles. Ideas are expressed adequately, though the argument is weakened by a lack of focus. The brief conclusion repeats points already stated. Overall, however, the essay exhibits sufficient awareness of task and writing mode.

Standard English Conventions – Score Point 3

The writing is sufficiently long and complex to demonstrate control of conventions. Though sometimes awkward, sentences are mostly correct and show a variety of forms: “A certain student had four suspensions in the last year, but after working in the Mindful Moment Room she no longer faced those consequences.” Relatively minor mistakes are balanced out by the amount of overall correctness shown in sentences such as “In Arturo A. Schomburg Satellite Academy, Lauren Cassani Davis reports in her article, *When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom* [“When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom”], that an ELA teacher name[d] Argos Gonzalez practices mindfulness with students for the first five minutes of ELA class.”

Student Work Sample

Mindfulness is an up and coming technique that is being used by students to help them focus their mind and become aware of their emotional state. Certain schools have adopted this method and have significant improvement in the student’s behavior and academic performance. In Arturo A. Schomburg Satellite Academy, Lauren Cassani Davis reports in her article, *When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom*, that an ELA teacher name Argos Gonzalez practices mindfulness with students for the first five minutes of ELA class. Davis says, “... Gonzalez’s students were familiar with these five-minute mindfulness exercises...that he uses to help train their attention, quiet their thoughts, and regulate their emotions,” (paragraph 11. Davis).

Studies have shown that Middlesex school-which is located in Massachusetts-recommends the course that they have taken because their sleep has improved as well as their stress levels have decreased. Davis reports on an author named Paul Tough who wrote *How Children Succeed*. Davis reports that, “...stress early in life can prompt a cascade negative effects, psychologically and neurologically-poor self-control and underdeveloped executive function, in particular,” (paragraph 14, Davis).

The students written about in *Instead of Detention, These Students Get Meditation* by Deborah Bloom, have faced many hardships that negatively impact their academic performance. “Some of our children are homeless...so we’re trying really hard here to make this a place where children feel safe and where their needs are met,” (paragraph 8, Bloom). However, mindfulness creates a space where the children are able to make better decisions and reflect on their character. A certain student had four suspensions in the last year, but after working in the Mindful Moment Room she no longer faced those consequences. Even the principal reported that the

amount of children coming to her for help had lessened.

School requires a student's mind for the majority of their day and their lives. This can take a toll on the way a human being functions. With mindfulness, mental health can improve which creates successful students. Not only in their academics, but in their everyday lives.

Idea Development – Score Point 2

The central idea of the argument is somewhat developed. The writer addresses the question but presents limited details from the articles. The claim that “it is important that teachers in schools across the country should be trained in mindfulness” is supported through the use of limited evidence from the two articles: “The meditation room is being used to have the kids relieve their stress in a different way other than physical violence.” Even relevant details suffer from a lack of larger explanation: “The article states that since the meditation room was introduced, that the amount of poor behavior has diminished almost completely.” Further details from the articles as well as an explanation of the impact a meditation room might have upon the writer’s school are not included after this broader statement. Organization is limited and expression of ideas is basic. The essay reveals a partial awareness of the writing task and of the mode of argument writing.

Standard English Conventions – Score Point 2

Control of sentence structures, grammar, usage and mechanics is mostly consistent. Though some sentences are formed correctly, others contain mistakes or are awkwardly written: “One reason for that is that some children have to deal with things at home that most adults dont have to deal with, and they have no way of letting that stress leave there body.” Other errors, such as “there home life” and “disciplinary,” are also present. Overall, there is an insufficient amount of writing combined with frequent enough errors to demonstrate consistent control.

Student Work Sample

It is important that teachers in schools across the country should be trained in mindfulness. One reason for that is that some children have to deal with things at home that most adults dont have to deal with, and they have no way of letting that stress leave there body. I believe that if they practiced mindfulness exercises, they would be less likely to cause trouble when they leave school. In "When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom", the author states that the school that Argos Gonzalez works at, is made up of a mix of black and hispanic teens, most of whom are living in one of the poorest districts of New York City. Argos Gonzalez uses mindfulness exercises to take the kids minds off of there home life and he has them focus on things that dont put them down. In the article "Instead of Detention", the students are in the same position as the students from "When Mindfulness Meets the Classroom". This article is based on a school in Baltimore that was having a plethora of disciplinary problems before the meditation room was brought in. The meditation room is being used to have the kids relieve their stress in a different way other than physical violence. The article states that since the meditation room was introduced, that the amount of poor behavior has diminished almost completely. Mindfulness exercies are good because it gives kids a better way to redirect negative feelings.

Idea Development – Score Point 1

This response presents a central idea in the first sentence: “[It’s] important for teachers in my school to be trained in mindfulness because it has shown improvement in students” However, there are insufficient details from the articles to support this idea, and overall development is very weak. Organization is minimal, and the response exhibits minimal awareness of task and mode.

Standard English Conventions – Score Point 1

The response contains noticeable errors in sentence formation and mechanics throughout. In addition to the numerous errors, the response is insufficient in length to demonstrate more than little control of sentences, grammar and usage, and mechanics.

Student Work Sample

Its important for teachers in my school to be trained in mindfulness because it has shown improvement in students,"reporting benefits ranging from better sleep and diminishes stress to increased focus on schoolwork." (Paragraph 13). With the majority of students enjoying this class , it helps students find a way to engage with themselves and one another in a calm collective way which results in further academic gains. The mindfulness in "Instead of Detention", states that a result of the new training thats been implimented , the disciplinarian has seen a significant drop in behavioral/disciplinary issues. "she rarely sees children for disciplinary issues anymore.

Idea Development – Score Point 0

While this response touches on some of the topics (“teaching,” “learning,” and “stress”) presented in the articles, it does not address the question and instead focuses on why teaching is a stressful job.

Standard English Conventions – Score Point 1

Though there are few errors in the response, it receives a score of 1 because the amount of text is insufficient to demonstrate more than little control of conventions. In addition, a response that receives a score of 0 in one domain cannot achieve a score greater than 1 in the other.

Student Work Sample

Teaching is a difficult and stressful job. Lessons must be taught within strictly limited timeframes and learning is often more open-ended. Teachers are expected to succeed, and they must stay calm and focused while bringing all students together to learn. How teachers deal with stress affects both their careers and how students learn. Schools should recognize these facts and not create obstacles to learning.

Idea Development – Score Point 0

This response does not address the writing prompt. It briefly refers to students “not behaving in class” and “dicepline” but does not present an argument for why teachers should be trained in mindfulness.

Standard English Conventions – Score Point 0

The response contains numerous errors in sentence structure, grammar, usage, and mechanics in minimal text and indicates no control of conventions.

Student Work Sample

When a student is not behaving in class the teacher send them to dicepline. I desagree about sending student to desapline because they dont do nothing in desapline. just sit doing nothing. I want that teachers make them do work because if they dont behave in class they can behave alone doing work.