

From the
SCHOOL COUNSELORS
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**Challenging
the Roots of
Competition**

The beginning of a new year is often a time for resolutions and for considering changes in attitude, actions or behaviors. But in our work as counselors at Menlo,

we never wait for the New Year to make “resolutions.” Students need support all year long, and we are dedicated to providing daily nurturing and guidance. Our approach is action-oriented, and in addition to direct student care, we provide several student and parent programs, collaborating to develop the overall wellness of campus life each and every day.

One powerful example of care, commitment and support in our community shines through with our [Parent and Faculty Education Conference](#), taking place this year on



Saturday, Feb. 7. While the conference is for adults, its goal is to support our children. The conference committee wanted this year’s theme to resonate with and build upon its previous themes of compassion, resilience and mindset. At the same time, it seemed imperative to address the effects of a competitive environment on our students’ lives. We hope that this conference’s theme, Thriving in a Competitive World, starts the conversation about healthy, and unhealthy, competition. What parts of competitive environments are under our control? How can we find a healthy balance of engagement that also allows children to thrive? More importantly, how can the adults in our community best model keeping our cool when feeling under pressure to succeed?

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Outside the Menlo campus, competition infiltrates everyday experiences. And our children can experience intense competitive moments and performance expectations in the classroom, on the courts and fields, and in the fingertips and voice boxes of our rising creative artists. Students have a right to learn how to manage, progress and thrive when competitive moments cross their path, rather than allowing its negative aspects to spread. Competitive environments, and competition itself, need not be alarming, and the conference theme is not meant



to raise your blood pressure or promote fear of failure as a parent. Instead, let's reclaim the positivity of *healthy* competition.

With unhealthy competition, you compete at everything, with no off switch, creating welled-up tears and feelings of panic. Comparison with others brings

about feelings of defeat and hopelessness. In that scenario, competition is like a powerful being that has complete control, negatively impacting hearts and minds in its wake. This is *not* what Menlo strives to promote.

On the other hand, in an environment of healthy competition you know that the level and number of pressure-inducing situations that you choose to engage in can be under *your* control. Competition itself is not the enemy. How you view, manage and implement actions when faced with adversity is crucial to thriving with competition, rather than being inundated by its potentially destructive tendencies. This conference is meant to be a beacon of light and hope in the midst of students' and families' exposure to over-controlled, negative performance pressure, and to explore and embody the benefits and advantages that can be harvested from competition.

This year's conference keynote speakers, [Po Bronson](#) and [Dr. Laura Kastner](#), compliment each other well as researchers and authors of parenting books. Both will provide a wealth of practical information to help us raise today's millennial generation. In addition, there will be optional breakout sessions with highly skilled local professionals, Dr. Jacob Towery, Dr. Vickie Chang and Susan Stone Belton, who have their fingers on the pulse of teen thoughts, actions and behaviors for middle and upper school children.

At Menlo, we are passionate about encouraging students to stretch themselves and raise challenging questions while leading healthful lives. This conference encourages the community to do the same, and to build a healthy mindset that helps make Menlo School a fabulously quirky, enjoyable, challenging and welcoming place to be. As counselors with a combined 20 years of work at Menlo, we embrace this mission and commit to being present and active partners in the development of your children.

The next time you are on campus, look around at the teachers, coaches and staff who provide the student learning and support that goes on every single day of your child's Menlo adventures. Those experiences, combined with outside interests and family upbringing, create his or her true self. Yes, competition exists and is a part of our culture, but we can help our children have healthy lives in a competitive world. We invite you to join us at this year's conference to gain a renewed sense of the benefits, joyful moments and accomplished goals that it can bring into the lives of our developing students.

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KnightLine is published in .pdf form on the Menlo School website each month, with an email alert including a link sent to all parents. For questions, please contact Alex Perez, Director of Communications, via email at alex.perez@menloschool.org or by calling 650.330.2001 ext. 2330.

