

## From the HEAD OF SCHOOL



This Thursday evening, I hope you will join Board Chair Larry Frye and me at the annual State of the School address, where you will have the opportunity to hear a lot about what we have been working on this year at Menlo and where we are going next.

Understanding that not all of you will be able to join us Thursday to hear the details, I thought it may be helpful to get a broad picture of how I see the state of the school.

In short, I am pleased to affirm that by every traditional measure, Menlo School is in excellent health. Larry will spend some time Thursday talking about the strength of our Board of Trustees—and it is an incredible group of people tasked with the overall success of Menlo—as well as the fiscal position of the school, which is in great shape.

The admissions season has finished for the most part and Beth Bishop's team has assembled incredible classes



at the sixth and ninth grades. This year featured record applications, and the strengths we found in the students we were lucky to attract bode well for the future of the school. This year we accepted about a quarter of the students who applied. I share this less as a statement about selectivity and more as an indicator of the opportunity that selectivity presents us: the ability to build a strong, diverse class of students. Every class needs leaders and also followers; we need athletes and artists and academicians; and most importantly we need great kids. Having four completely viable applications for every spot gives us a distinct advantage in building classes of students that make our community even stronger.

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*“It is the intangibles that give me the greatest faith in the health of Menlo School right now.”*

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On the other end of the Menlo experience, the Class of 2015 has experienced a remarkable year in the college admissions process. Though we are still hearing from a few colleges and working with students who have been waitlisted at this school or that (as is always the case), it is clear that this year's seniors are being accepted to a wonderful variety of colleges and universities, including some of the most selective in the country, at five or even six times the national average. Just amazing! These results are mostly a testament to the individuals in that class: who they are as people, scholars, artists and athletes. This success also speaks to the Menlo education and our reputation among colleges and universities, as well as to our teachers and our programs that prepare students so well for the experiences they will have in college. Finally, this speaks to our college counseling team, led by Mark Clevenger, that both knows our students well and has



incredible relationships with hundreds of colleges around the country, enabling them to connect each of our students to the right school for them.



The centerpiece of our health as a school is of course our faculty. I have been associated with 22 faculties at four schools, and I have to say that Menlo's is among the strongest groups of educators I have had the good fortune to work with. Our faculty is incredibly dedicated and continues to get better at what they do through their investment in professional growth and development and through ongoing conversations about how we can best serve our students. I am sad to report that we are losing 12 faculty members this year as well as Jen Glasser, our Middle School Director. It definitely feels, as it often does, like a lot of talented people are moving on to other ventures. Good schools pay attention to the reasons faculty choose to leave, and in our case there is no common story behind these teachers' departures: four are retiring, four are moving to be closer to family, one received a promotion at another school, one can no longer afford the cost of living in this area and two are ready for something else besides school. A turnover of 6-10 faculty every year is about what should be expected, perhaps even healthy. This year's numbers are a little on the high side for my comfort, and we will pay close attention to this as we move forward. On the positive side, our search



efforts have yielded excellent results, and I am pleased to report that we landed our first-choice candidate in every single search we did this year, including the search for a new Middle School Director that yielded us La Vina Lowery.

Having written all of the above, it is the intangibles that give me the greatest faith in the health of Menlo School

right now. As some of you may know, I meet with all of the sixth, eighth, ninth and 12<sup>th</sup> graders each year to hear about Menlo and learn about what they love and what could be better. The themes across groups are pretty predictable.

Students love:

- The faculty: their flexibility, accessibility, deep caring and connection and, of course, their wisdom and ability to make the learning in their classrooms meaningful.
- The community: students like that this is a place where it is cool to be smart, where you can find support from your peers and where you are trusted even before you have proven you are worthy of that trust.
- The opportunities: across divisions and grade levels, students like that there are a lot of options for them to explore, experiment with and dive into if they wish.

The health of the school is even seen in what students wish were different at Menlo:

- The sixth graders like the food for the most part and the 12<sup>th</sup> graders do not.
- Almost every group I spoke with wishes they could sleep in more, though few students would sacrifice anything they do during their day in order to achieve this goal.
- All students wish that homework and assignments could be better coordinated, but they also universally agree that, for the most part, assignments and assessments further their learning and are much more than just busy work.

While there are certainly some deeper issues we are working on, we are in a good place as a school if homework coordination, sleep and cafeteria food are the issues of the day.

Now, if you would like to hear more about what we have specifically been working on this year and what is coming up for Menlo, including the work we have done on our strategic plan and the results so far, I invite you to join us Thursday at 6:00 pm for what will be an informative and, we hope, inspiring evening. See you there!

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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](mailto:alex.perez@menloschool.org) or by calling 650.330.2001 ext. 2330.

