

# MSPA US Meeting

August 30, 2017 (8:50 am - 9:58 am)

## Welcome! Happy New Year Reflections and Resolutions

Mary Pinkus, US Co-President

Mary welcomed the parents to a new school year with “Happy New Year” hats and horns. Because it’s the beginning of a new year, she had some reflections about where we are and some resolutions for the upcoming year. Her reflections were that: 1) she is grateful for the new Commons--the building but more importantly the people inside, and 2) she is grateful for the MSPA Council, the faculty and administration, and all the parent volunteers at Menlo. Her resolutions were: 1) to take an “attitude of gratitude,” reaching out to teachers and coaches when she is happy or inspired, instead of only communicating when she is concerned, and 2) to make more fun, especially for the kids.

### [US Parent Vote on VP Co-President Elect Proposal](#)

The Proposal has been posted on the website for a couple of weeks. It was also printed on the meeting agenda. The Proposal was to elect the Co-Presidents a year before their terms start so that they have a year to shadow the current Co-Presidents. Amy Sanford moved to change the terms of the US and MS MSPA Co-Presidents; Seth Rosenblatt seconded the motion. The US parents voted unanimously to change the terms of the US and MS MSPA Co-Presidents.

## Back to School Updates

Than Healy, Head of School

The school year is off to a great start. The kids are using the Commons in inspired ways we never considered, and the food is delicious. The seniors are doing a great job leading, and the freshman are settling in. We have a strong group of new faculty members; the most important characteristic the school looks for in new faculty is that they like kids and like being around kids.

Some issues are lingering from last spring, in particular the discussion about whether Menlo’s grades are too low, hurting the kids in the college process. Menlo has reached out to other schools to get their data on grades, standardized test scores and college acceptances. Menlo is just getting that data back and starting to analyze it. From the data and analysis, Menlo will create a report. If the report shows that our kids are being hurt, we will make changes.

The conversation around grades has set off everyone’s insecurities and fears--the students, the parents, and the faculty. For parents, the feeling of scarcity around college admissions fosters that insecurity and fear. We fear that we are failing our kids if we don’t ensure that they have

the best college opportunities. Instead of riding the wave of insecurity and fear, let's remember what our greatest hope for the children is: to be happy and healthy. It's hard to remember that hope when we are anxious. This leads us to do things that get in the way of their health and happiness, such as: 1) following up with them more than we should, 2) comparing them to other kids, and 3) talking about our own success.

At the faculty retreat before the start of school, the faculty discussed its core purpose and agreed that it was to communicate their belief in the students. In the afternoon, outside teambuilding facilitators had groups of faculty members assemble thirty bikes and prepare presentations about the bikes and the process. Right before the presentations, thirty kids from the Boys and Girls Club came in; the bikes were going to be their first bikes. It was a magical moment that illustrated how the faculty's work is for students, who are kids going through something for the first time.

This year, Than wants the faculty and the parents to stay focused on their core purpose and hope. From the parents, Than also asked for two additional things. First, don't expect instant excellence. Menlo strives for excellence and often achieves it, but it is not perfect. New faculty members may need more than a semester to get there; please be patient. Second, please trust the administration at Menlo. Generally, it knows about a problem and is working on it. If you don't think it does, please tell us but trust us if we tell you that we are working on it.

## Introduce New Service Learning Plan

Jessie Brugos, Director of Service Learning

Menlo wants the kids to leave school empowered to do things that will make things better for their own community but also other communities. So, starting with the class of 2020, the Service Learning Plan will change so that only service that helps communities outside Menlo and helps fight an injustice, will count towards satisfying the Plan. Ten community engagements will be required per year. How the engagements work is outlined on the Menlo website.

Please help your kids think about the Plan as a way to give back, not to get credit. One way to do that is to participate yourself. Two good options for parent participation are the Valpo Fun Run and the blood drive.

## Introduce the New Upper School Teachers

John Schafer, Upper School Director

After warning them that they would also have to wear "Happy New Year" hats, John introduced some of the new faculty for the upper school.

Katherine Sanden: She teaches Geometry and Comp Sci and works in academic support. She attended Menlo for one year in the 7th grade and was impressed by how welcomed she felt. She holds a masters in education from Stanford and a BA in math from Princeton. Most recently, she taught at the Gateway School in San Francisco.

Jane Ridgeway: She will teach 9th and 10th grade English. She worked in film in Los Angeles before becoming a teacher. She earned her MFA in creative writing at the University of Oregon, where she also taught undergraduate creative writing and composition. Before that she taught at the 'Iolani School in Hawaii. When she first moved to the Bay Area, she was the education editor at the *Los Altos Crier*, writing about Silicon Valley schools. She became an English teacher because her own English teachers had such a strong influence on her. She appreciates that the Menlo kids are good at respectful disagreement.

Tyson Morgan: He will be teaching 9th and 12th grade English. He moved around a lot as a child because his family was in the military. He is thinking about Houston because that is where he moved from. He taught at the Kinkaid School there and, before that, got his MFA in fiction writing from the University of Houston. He moved to the Bay Area because his wife was given a position at San Jose State.

Laura Davidson: She is also from Houston and thinking about it. She will be teaching English. She comes from Sequoia High School in Redwood City. Prior to that, she attended the Sanford STEP program, worked in advertising and attended Princeton for her undergraduate work. She appreciates the small class sizes at Menlo and the ability to do group work.

Quinton McArthur: He is the new college counselor; he started last May. Previously, he worked in college counseling for 15 years at Rowan University, University of Maryland at College Park, and MIT. Last year he came to Menlo to give a presentation about MIT, and he enjoyed Menlo a lot.

Nick Romeo: He is teaching 10th and 11th grade English. Previously, he worked as a journalist for three years and has published articles in *National Geographic*, *The Washington Post*, and *The New Yorker*. He studied Greek for 5 years at UC Boulder, where he also taught undergraduates. He went to undergraduate at Northwestern.

Leo Kitajima: He will lead the US orchestra and jazz programs and the MS Chamber Ensemble. He previously taught at the Westridge School in Los Angeles. He has a masters in music education from Northwestern. He has a great job because he rarely meets people who don't like music; most kids are enthusiastic about playing with him.

Esther Mansdorf: She is teaching history. She loves history because it focuses on the narratives we tell and the layers of those narratives. She came from NYC, where she taught on the Upper West Side. She attended the University of Chicago and Cambridge and worked in a non-profit in the Bronx before going to get her MS in education.

John then addressed the grades controversy. He said that he is in the process of writing a long report that looks at historical data and surveys with alumni. The upshot is that nothing is dramatically broken. The school is in good shape and highly regarded by the outside world.

The school will make the changes it needs to. For example, the teachers need to grade together so that all classes in a particular subject have the same standards.

The goal this year is to stitch back together the fabric of the school. The teachers want the best for the kids; any accusation that they don't is hurtful, such as saying that an A- is the last nail in the coffin for my kid.

He asked the parents to help steer the conversation away from grades and back to learning and growth. Instead of asking your kids what grade they got on their French Revolution quiz, ask them about the French Revolution. And, thank a teacher if he or she engages your child; John then read an email from a parent that did that.

## Brief Announcements

Mary Pinkus, Parent Chair of the Valpo Fun Run

The Valpo Fun Run is Sunday, September 17th at 9 am. It benefits the Peninsula Bridge program. Menlo hosts it with Sacred Heart so we can make connections with our next-door neighbors, as well as our broader neighbors in the Bridge program. You don't need to run; it's just a great community-building event. You can sign up to "run" through the link in zipNotes or eNotes or through Active.com; you can also sign up to volunteer.

Alison Leupold, Parent Chair of the Annual Fund

Last year, we raised \$3.9M with close to 100% participation from the community. The money the Annual Fund raises is used in the current year as part of the operating budget; it provides the "margin of excellence" at Menlo. It will kick off at the beginning of October and will end at the end of November. You will be contacted by parent volunteers, so please respond to them as they are volunteering their time.

It is a personal decision what each family donates to the Annual Fund, but we ask that you make Menlo's Annual Fund a significant philanthropic priority while your kids are here. The Annual Fund raises \$4800 per student. If you can cover the cost of each of your children, please do. If you have the means to cover the cost of other children whose families cannot afford it, we would appreciate your generosity.