

From the HEAD OF SCHOOL



Have you heard about “teacups” and “crispies”? These are the semi-pejorative terms that college admissions deans started using a few years back to describe, in shorthand, applicants to their colleges that were either “wonderful when you look at them at first but so fragile they will break if anything rough happens”

(teacups) or “so over-programmed and filled with activities through their first 18 years that they are burned out by the time they get to college” (crispies). These metaphors ring true for parents of children in challenging times, and we worry. We worry about whether we are giving our students every opportunity through these middle and high school years to develop their strengths, talents and passions, and then we worry about whether we are doing too much for them. How does an eleven-year-old even know what his or her passions are? But unlike those in my generation, these kids don’t feel as though they have the luxury of waiting until they are 16 to hone a skill or passion. When are we doing too much, and when are we neglecting our



children’s future? My bet is that these questions are at the top of the list when parents question or reflect on their parenting approach.

Sadly, the implications for this discussion go well beyond grades, achievements or the college admissions process. It is indeed tricky for students to



come across as impressive on their college resumes without looking like teacups or crispies, and it is indeed important that our students thrive in their educational career without shattering at the first sign of adversity or running out of gas in their first semester of college.

But the true implications are for the long-term health of our kids. The habits they have built in preparing for college will live with them for the rest of their lives. The question that ought to be at the forefront for every parent is this: What are we teaching our children about how to respond to adversity?

We spend a lot of time at Menlo talking about the symptoms of long-term stress, anxiety and depression. The discussions this fall about homework load, the conversations

about the frequency and rigor of assessment, and the study John Schafer led in the Upper School about busyness (outlined in last month’s *KnightLine*) are all evidence that this school takes these concerns seriously. And these conversations will and should continue. At the same time, I can’t help but feel that we are only addressing half of the issue. While we should absolutely work as a school to gauge

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how challenging to make our program, how high to set the bar academically and how much we should allow students to take on, we should also be working together as a school and as a parent community to build within our students the tools that will allow them to turn adversity into opportunity—at Menlo, in college and then in life beyond academia. In short, we should be teaching resilience.

I am very much looking forward to the upcoming Parent and Faculty Education Conference on this very topic, organized by Upper School Counselor Tracy Bianchi, Middle School Counselor Laura McGourty, and the dedicated parent volunteers within the Parent Education Committee. The conference will feature panelists, presenters and a number of discussion opportunities, but at its heart will be keynote speaker Dr. Alex Lickerman, author of *The Undefeated Mind*, who writes and speaks about the “science of constructing an indestructible self.” The goal of the conference goes beyond helping our students build the inner strength necessary to graduate from Menlo or negotiate the college admissions process. The conference will go further and help us teach our students and children how to confront and learn to navigate, successfully and healthfully, the challenges they will find in their lives.

I certainly hope that you will be able to join us at the conference (a much-loved annual event) on Saturday, February 8 from 8:00 am to 11:45 am. More importantly, I hope that in doing so you access thinking or advice that may help you negotiate the challenges of teacups and crispies for our children.

Sincerely,

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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.

