

From the  
HEAD OF SCHOOL  
*Norm Colb*



## The Partnership Between School and Home

At the end of this article I am going to urge you to attend Menlo's Ninth Annual Parent & Faculty Education Conference, one of the most important events in Menlo's crowded calendar. Everyone who sends a child to Menlo should take advantage of this conference.

To explain why this conference is so important, I'd like to roll back a couple of months to an event that sharpened my understanding of what Menlo is all about.

There I was, nearing the end of an admissions coffee in the home of a Menlo family. The hosts had graciously opened their home to fifteen prospective parents, and now, after I had spoken for 20 minutes or so about Menlo's program and the type of applicant most likely to thrive here, it was time to answer questions—the part of the program that is usually the most interesting and worthwhile.

The questions began. Faculty? Outstanding. College counseling? Absolutely. Community service? Strong and getting stronger. Civility and character? The best.

And then, from the far reaches of the living room came a question I had never heard in all of my years of participating in admissions meetings: "How does Menlo encourage students to compete with each other? To strive to be better than everyone else in the class?" At a loss for words, I stared at the questioner, then at the floor, then at the ceiling for several—but long!—seconds and finally suggested that Menlo might not be a particularly good match for her family's values. After a few more questions—and they were mercifully more predictable—the evening drew to a close.

I mention this for two reasons. First, I thought you might enjoy knowing how I spend some of my evenings. And second, and much more seriously, I am sure that your reaction to this question would have been almost identical to mine. The fact is that to an extraordinary extent members of the Menlo community share a set

of important core beliefs and values. For example, we believe

- that every child counts and has gifts to be nourished,
- that we should have high standards for all students,
- that learning should be joyous and engaging,
- that students can and should be trusted,
- that the Menlo community should be strong and inclusive for students and parents alike, and
- that the relationship between home and school should be respectful, open and mutually supportive.

I wonder if these strike you as so obvious that they are not even worth the electrons it took to list them. Well, as the old saying goes, the last thing a fish thinks about is water, but water really is important. As hard as it may be to believe, not every school cares about the same values. On the contrary, there are schools in which there is a tacit agreement that only the strongest students matter and that the bulk of the student body counts much less than the superstars. There are schools in which parents are very actively encouraged to stay away. And there are schools where very little attention, if any at all, goes to building a sense of community. So to my eye, Menlo's values are fairly distinctive, and the fact that we take them so seriously, and that both school and parents share these values, is even more distinctive still.

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Of course, having a list of values to which we all agree is one thing, but it is quite another to actually put these values into practice in our day-to-day interactions with our children. And this brings me back to Menlo's annual Parent & Faculty Education Conference, which this year will be held on Saturday, February 6. The Conference gives us the invaluable opportunity to hear from professionals with deep expertise and to reflect on how parents and teachers can, in partnership, do the very best to raise children who are healthy, productive and resilient. I can guarantee you that the three or four hours you invest at this very special opportunity will pay great dividends. I urge you to register for the Conference and then ink it in on your calendars.

I look forward to seeing you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Norm Colb". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a white background.

# Counseling the Student/Counseling the Family

When Menlo students say they feel safe on our campus, it is in large part thanks to our two remarkable school counselors: Tracy Bianchi in the Upper School and Laura McGourty in the Middle School. Both of these women work tirelessly to ensure that students have a place where they can discuss issues and strategize ways to navigate through the often stressful world of a teenager.



*Upper School Counselor  
Tracy Bianchi*

Tracy came to Menlo in 2002 after a career doing clinical work in several communities, resource centers and school systems and immersing herself in a private psychotherapy practice in Menlo Park. Her current duties at Menlo include mental health counseling, psychological support services and various parent and student programs. In addition, she teaches a portion of the Freshman Seminar on Adolescent Topics and Conversations. Tracy's goal for the seminar is "to begin creating a relationship with each and every freshman as they enter their four-year life as a high school student," as well as engaging in important and meaningful topics surrounding adolescent experiences.

Laura is in her second stint at Menlo. First hired in 1998 as an eighth-grade science teacher, she spent three years in the classroom before leaving to pursue her Master's in counseling. After working as a therapist in school and clinical settings, Laura returned in 2007 at the request of then newly appointed Middle School Director Erin Brigham. In addition to her current role as counselor for students and their families at Menlo, Laura spends each day teaching the Human Skills and Resources class. When asked about what she loves most about her job, she says, "This is exciting work. The Middle Schooler is a unique being. Every day brings a new developmental challenge, and is it thrilling to guide young people through these intense and goofy years."

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Tracy and Laura do more than provide support for the students; they also play vital roles in forging a school-parent alliance through their parent education programs. Throughout the year, both counselors conduct a series of evenings geared toward helping parents navigate through the landmines of the teenage years. Annually, they spearhead the efforts behind the Parent & Faculty Education Conference. For both Tracy and Laura, parent education is crucial in building the right partnership between the School and our parent community. For them, this work is essential because, as Tracy notes, "Menlo continues to put parent education as a top priority. We feel it is important to embrace the family as a whole. Parent education is an avenue of support and a means to enhance our community relationship with all families. Raising teenagers can be difficult. Most parents feel, during their child's teenage years, like they're watching their growing 'babies' begin to behave in impulsive and confusing ways. Parent education is a key to providing ideas and tools to help parents reconnect with their children before they take that independent road to college life and adulthood."

The Parent & Faculty Education Conference this year will focus on "Open Door Parenting"—how to keep lines of communication open with your teen. Tracy and Laura are eager to see you participate in this exciting opportunity. As Laura explains, "research shows that connection to adults is directly related to healthy kids. And this conference is highlighting how to keep lines of communication open, how to understand social networking, and how to show our kids the best ways to advocate for themselves—in short, how to listen and connect to your children."

*For information on the Parent & Faculty Education Conference, click [here](#).*



*Middle School Counselor Laura McGourty with Erin Brigham, Director of the Middle School*

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

