From the Director

The Magic of Challenge

Meet Two Amazing Educators

College Matters

Save the Worms!

Fall Social Skills Groups

Why, Thank You, We Love You, Too!

Be Present, Be Happy, Be Well!

Parent, Educate Thyself

Our Growing Team

Providing Worlds of Opportunities for Those Who Learn Differently

by Lyn Balistreri, Director of Fund Development

Each autumn, Morrissey-Compton Educational Center commemorates the start of a new school year by celebrating some of the unsung heroes in our community: educational professionals who, through their tireless commitment, unwavering dedication, and enthusiasm for sharing their love of learning have enriched—and quite often, changed—the lives of many students.

During a special dinner event on Saturday, October 8 at La Honda Winery in Redwood City, Morrissey-Compton will honor Chris Bischof, Founder & Principal of Eastside College Preparatory School, and David Laurance, Principal of Beechwood School, as our 2016 Outstanding Educators.

Providing What, and to Whom

The theme of this year’s event is “Providing Worlds of Opportunities.” These opportunities enable individuals to succeed, in both their academic and life pursuits, and are twofold:

1. Those that outstanding educators open for students.

2. Those that the funds generated from the event provide for individuals with learning differences.

In addition to being a celebration of educators in general (and two in particular), this annual event is a fundraiser for Morrissey-Compton. Gifts of all sizes are encouraged, and all of the proceeds go towards providing scholarships in 2017 to families and individuals who need our services, but cannot afford to pay for them without financial aid.

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Dear Friends,

As you read the pages to follow, you may note, as I have, that while Morrissey-Compton Educational Center has had many successful programs since its inception, it is still very much a work in progress. We continue to evolve, while holding on to those programs that have worked well from the beginning. For example, 34 years later, Challenge Summer School is still the only private summer school in our area that is not part of a year-round special education school—and it is still very much needed, and enjoyed, by students with special needs. Every year, it makes us so happy to see children who have come to dread going to school grow to love learning, thanks to the unique Challenge experience.

At the same time, just as learning differences start to become more widely discussed and accepted in our society, Morrissey-Compton continues to expand our offerings to try to meet the needs of the now and the future. To this end, we have added a psychiatrist, Dr. Thomas Butler, to our staff. Traditionally, psychiatrists have been able to handle certain aspects of mental health treatment (e.g., prescribing medications where necessary) that our staff psychologists have had to refer outside of the agency. We hope that having Dr. Butler on staff will help streamline the process for some of our clients.

In addition, we are now offering a Yoga and Mindfulness Series year-round at our Redwood City office. As part of our Challenge School curriculum in recent years, we have seen how it benefits the overall well-being and adaptation of students. I’m confident that our new yoga instructor, Madeline Harmon, will quickly become a favorite of both parents and children. We hope you enjoy her article (pages 12-13) on the value of yoga and mindfulness to academic success.

Those of you who have supported Morrissey-Compton in the past recently received our 2015 Annual Report (it is also available for viewing on our website). In it, you will see that our agency has been able to remain strong in terms of fundraising income. However, maintaining this may prove to be difficult in years to come. Like many agencies, our donor base has been transitioning, and we cannot take for granted that we will continue to receive the same level of support that we have enjoyed in years past. One of our greatest challenges is attracting, and maintaining, the next generation of donors. And while we did very well during Silicon Valley Gives earlier this year, we have been notified that this day of online giving will not occur in 2017, so we will need to find new sources of fundraising income to meet that shortfall.

I’d therefore like to conclude this month’s letter with a special request. Our cover story details a special event we hold each year to honor educators and raise money for scholarships for services in the next year. This year’s Outstanding Educators, Chris Bischof and David Laurance, are examples of some of the very best our community has to offer. During a special dinner on October 8, we will be honoring Chris and David as well as the other educators who, through their tireless efforts, make such a wonderful difference in so many lives. Please consider making a special gift to Morrissey-Compton in their honor, or to honor an educator who has a special place in your heart. We promise that your gift will open worlds of opportunities for a person who, with the help of our caring specialists, has the potential to lead a happy and successful life.

Warm Regards,

John T. Brentar, Ph.D.

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Celebrating the Olympics, Challenge School-Style!

by Ashley Kinkaid Koedel, M.A., Director, Challenge School, & Senior Educational Specialist

It was another wonderful summer of learning, laughter, and self-discovery at Challenge School. Our 34th summer serving children with attention and learning disorders on the Peninsula was certainly one for the books!

This summer’s theme was the Olympics, which allowed for daily discussions and activities around the values that make an Olympian truly great. While many of these can be directly related to participation in sports, the values are also those that can be used in daily life, because they provide an excellent guide for living a life based on achieving goals, making the most of your talents, and caring about others. Having such a theme allows for a reading and writing curriculum that is of high-interest and relevance to our student body.

Behind the Magic of Challenge School

Our gifted, multi-disciplinary team of educators is passionate about helping each and every child reach their individual goals and recognize their potential. Our teaching staff is above and beyond what we have experienced school stress and can benefit from a boost of academic self-esteem by learning specific strategies in a fun, theme-based, camp-like environment, he or she just may be one of our next Challenge students. Look for applications and further information in January!

Individualized Attention

Expression

Achievement

Fun

Creativity

Discovery
What makes for an Outstanding Educator? Actually, as Carl Jung summed it up nicely:

“One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.”

In addition to being gifted with this warmth, our 2016 Outstanding Educators, David Laurance and Chris Bischof, share other important similarities. Each has made it his personal responsibility to ensure that every child has the opportunity to get a quality education he or she deserves. Each has made it possible for hundreds of students to become the first in their families to graduate from college. And each continues to provide inspiration for their colleagues, as well as for future generations of educators.

Their schools also complement each other. David’s Beechwood School serves students from grades K-8, while Chris’ Eastside Prep handles grades 9-12. Both are nonprofit organizations that were founded to help underserved students in the East Palo Alto community who were not being allowed access to a quality education. Every year, students from Beechwood are admitted into the freshman class at Eastside Prep. And the majority of the students who attend either school are only able to do so thanks to full or partial scholarships.

Back Where He Belongs

Born in Killeen, Texas, David Laurance might very well be genetically predisposed towards his chosen profession. His mother was a grade school/pre-school teacher, his father is a college professor, and his sister and brother are also teachers. David recalls that while he was attending high school at Stevenson School, “It occurred to me that the teachers we had seemed happy in their chosen profession.”

While in college at UC Santa Barbara, David earned a Bachelor’s in Liberal Studies. After graduation, he went to Boston for a private schools job fair. There, he landed a position at the Winchendon School, a boarding school for struggling students, where he taught from 1987 to 1989. “Though my experience there was mixed, it gave me the experience I needed to start a career in education,” David notes.

David’s career path took a bit of a detour when, starting in 1989, he managed the First Watch Restaurant in San Francisco. “Beechwood found me in 1993 and saved me from the grind of restaurant work,” says David. “I did not really know that I wanted to be an educator until I came to Beechwood. There, I learned that I could make a positive difference for deserving children and their families. I am so fortunate to have landed at Beechwood and to have been a part of the school’s growth.”

David taught at Beechwood for 15 years, and has been Principal for eight. He was named Outstanding Educator by Acknowledge Alliance in 2013. He and his wife, Margaret, have two daughters, Emily and Charlotte. Emily, an apparent “teaching gene,” is currently a first and second grade intern at Beechwood.

Creating His Own Niche

Chris Bischof is one of those fortunate individuals who found his true calling while still in college. Born in New York, Chris began his journey as an educator as an undergraduate at Stanford, when he developed an after-school program to help underserved middle-school minority students in East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park reach their full academic potential. Chris’ program, called Shoot for the Stars,” used basketball as an incentive to motivate students to learn: students would get 90 minutes of tutoring in exchange for 90 minutes of court time.

As it happens, these youth were facing tremendous obstacles to getting a quality education. East Palo Alto’s only high school had closed as a result of a 1976 desegregation order, and students were being bused to schools in other districts, where they were assigned to non-college track classes. Chris was concerned when he learned that 65 percent of these students were not graduating, and of the 35 percent who did graduate, less than 10 percent enrolled in four-year colleges. He was convinced that if given proper support, these students could go on to college and succeed in life. Chris’ experiences motivated him to earn a Master’s Degree from the Stanford Teacher Education Program and pursue a career in teaching.

In 1996, at the age of 26, Bischof and his Stanford classmate Helen Kim founded Eastside College Preparatory School. In the beginning, this private school, which consisted of eight students and three staff members, met at a picnic table in a park, then in rooms borrowed from local nonprofits. Since then, they have built a permanent campus that includes on-site housing for students and staff. Of the 550 students who have since graduated from Eastside, 100 percent have been admitted to four-year colleges. He was convinced that if given proper support, these students could go on to college and succeed in life. Chris’ experiences motivated him to earn a Master’s Degree from the Stanford Teacher Education Program and pursue a career in teaching.

In 2004, the American Institute for Public Service awarded Chris with a Jefferson Award. As quoted in a follow-up article published in the San Francisco Chronicle on January 22, 2005, Chris said, “Any time you are the first member of your family to go to college, you are going to be a pioneer for your family and your community. Eastside gets them ready to gain entrance to college, but also helps them compete when they get there.”

In that same article, Eastside Vice Principal and Co-Founder Helen Kim noted that “Eastside is a pretty inspiring story for everyone involved. It shows what can be done when one individual like Chris has a vision and commitment and tenacity to bring it to life.” Chris had equally complementary words to say about his Eastside staff: “It’s amazing to be inspired by Acknowledge Alliance in 2013. He and his wife, Margaret, have two daughters, Emily and Charlotte. Emily, an apparent ‘teaching gene,’ is currently a first and second grade intern at Beechwood.

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It’s Time to Find Your Own Inspiration!

Chris and David are two shining examples of the many wonderful educators in our community who serve students with special needs. Chances are that you, or someone in your family, has been helped by one or more of these individuals. Please take a moment to remember those teachers, tutors, and other educational professionals who have made a difference in your life, or in the life of your child, and consider making a gift to Morrissey-Compton in their honor to help students with learning differences continue to get access to the services they need to succeed—academically, and beyond.
College Advocacy

Stepping Up: Becoming One’s Own Advocate in College
A Student’s Perspective

At Morrissey-Compton, we often assess students at multiple stages of academic development. Parents may bring their daughter in for her first evaluation in third grade and learn that she has dyslexia. As she transitions to middle school and then to college, she may return for updated testing to track her progress and determine current needs. We are pleased to include an article in this newsletter about a young man with a learning difference who has kindly and candidly shared some of the successes and challenges surrounding his transition from a high school student with parent and teacher support to an independent student on a college campus. In our next newsletter, we will share with you a perspective from a student who is currently in high school.

Heading off to college is full of dramatic changes. You live in a dorm full of people (and noise). Your family isn’t around. You eat in a dining hall and can decide whether frozen yogurt is a perfectly acceptable breakfast. In the midst of all these differences, one of the biggest changes I encountered in transitioning to college was having to be my own advocate when it comes to my learning difference.

From A Secure Support System...

For me, high school was a safe place. I had the same counselor year after year. I sometimes took classes from the same teachers in different years. Even if I was in a new classroom, I had a litany of former teachers on campus who could serve as advocates or advisors and take an active role in helping me find success. In fact, for me, as is often the case, it was a teacher who suggested getting tested for a learning difference. Because dealing with my learning disability came with lots of tests, paperwork, meetings, and bureaucracy, my parents took an active role in making sure that everything went smoothly.

…to Sudden Autonomy

When I went to college, I discovered an entirely different situation. While you may still feel like a kid, universities will treat you like an adult. No one is “responsible” for your success. No one is going to hold your hand. I encountered a whole series of changes that made it so I had to step up. I had to be my own advocate if I was going to make sure my academic life avoided any major obstacles.

This wasn’t easy. In college, you have new teachers every quarter or semester. Because of the high number of course offerings, you will likely not have friends in most classes like in high school. Classes, especially introductory lectures, can consist of hundreds of students. You don’t have the old teachers, counselors, or parents you did in high school to help you. The thought of walking up to a professor I didn’t know after class to have a discussion about accommodations for my learning difference was terrifying to me. In fact, for the first few weeks of school, I delayed taking any action because of my fears and reluctance to step up.

Taking a Chance

As the quarter went on, it became clear to me that while it was indeed difficult to be responsible for myself, I needed my LD accommodations if I was going to be successful in college. That meant stepping up and being my own self-advocate. I tentatively reached out to my professors, told them about my learning difference, and asked them to meet to talk about my accommodations. All of my professors were helpful, and clearly had come across this situation before; I, of course, was not even close to being the first student with a learning difference they had encountered.

After a year in college, the process of communicating with my professors about my learning difference and accommodations has become second nature. My experience has given me a few lessons that I would like to share with incoming students:

- **Your professors want you to succeed.** They are not as scary as they may seem in front of a classroom of hundreds.
- **If your class has teaching assistants, contact them.** They are usually only a few years older than you, so far more approachable. They often handle the logistics of the class and are more likely than a professor to interact with you directly.
- **Reach out to professors and T.A.’s early in the term to meet at a time that’s convenient for them.** This will give them ample time to come up with a plan of action. If you leave them with little time before you need your accommodations, they will be less helpful.
- **Find your academic resource center early in the year.** The employees there will go out of their way to help you and can serve as useful advisors.

Should your child need a re-evaluation to document the special accommodations in college, such as a note-taker or extended time for tests, please contact Morrissey-Compton’s Intake Coordinator, Suzy Music, at suzy.music@morcomp.org to schedule a consultation or evaluation.

Similarly, if you suspect that your child may have a learning difference, but has never been tested, we often see students for the first time during their junior or senior years of high school. It is never too late to learn more about your child’s learning profile.

After College

Have You Heard? We Now Offer Vocational Assessments!

Last quarter’s newsletter included an interesting article from Dr. Ted Alper about the challenges being faced by today’s college students as they attempt to transition to the working world. Engaging in a clinical vocational assessment is a good way to increase students’ chances for success, and to meet this growing demand, Morrissey-Compton Educational Center is pleased to announce that Dr. Alper is heading our new Vocational Assessment Program.

What Makes Us Different?

Although standard vocational tools may be readily accessible, they don’t take into account the special needs of those individuals facing learning or social-emotional challenges. Morrissey-Compton is familiar with the functional limitations or difficulties associated with these challenges and can help tailor the assessments accordingly.

What to Expect

A typical clinical vocational assessment includes an interview, standardized skills tests, and completion of surveys and rating scales. Evaluations are tailored based on presenting concerns, age, past and anticipated future educational plans, and previous job-related experiences.

After the evaluation, the final summary takes into account the individual’s cognitive profile, areas of strengths and weaknesses, and areas of interests to provide extensive information to be used by individuals and their counselors to develop a pragmatic career/vocational plan. We also make referrals to local professionals, such as career counselors, who can offer appropriate follow-up services.

For information, contact Dr. Alper at ted.alper@morcomp.org.
To schedule a vocational assessment, call (650) 322-5910.
“Nobody Likes Me, Everybody Hates Me”: Helping Kids Learn Skills to Make Friends
by Sue Garber, M.A., Director of Parent Education and Social Skills Groups

“Nobody likes me, everybody hates me,
Guess I’ll go eat worms,
Long, thin, slimy ones; short, fat, juicy ones,
Bisq, bitay, fuzzy wuzzy worms.”

Many of us remember hearing this rhyme (or a regional variation of lyrics) on the playground when we were kids. While it remains a humorous little ditty, it exemplifies the sort of sad and disillusioned thinking often experienced by children who struggle with making or keeping friends.

No Shades of Grey…
From the first line, we see a common, yet harmful, all-or-nothing, black-and-white view of the world. By stating, “NOBODY likes me, EVERYBODY hates me,” the child in the song doesn’t consider that peers may like some of their qualities and behaviors, but may not like everything about them. The danger of believing the first two lines of this seemingly innocuous song is that children who feel disliked often feel lonely and hurt, and behave in ways that further distance them from potential friendships. The line, “Guess I’ll go eat worms” conjures an image of an unpleasant, self-punishing activity. The song points to a cycle of feeling hated and perpetuating the isolation with social behavior that is off-putting to others.

...But That's Stinkin’ Thinkin’
It is heartbreaking to think of children who don’t have friends or the skills to connect with others in a meaningful way. But fortunately, the skills needed to create friendships can be learned—and that is exactly what happens in our Morrissey-Compton Social Skills Groups.

Let’s think again about the child from the song. The image of a lonely child resorting to eating disgusting worms makes me think about the skills that this child would benefit from learning.

First, the child lacks awareness of “expected” and “unexpected” social behavior. There are many strategies for coping with feelings of sadness or rejection; however, eating worms is clearly an ineffective choice. In addition to not soothing the child’s feelings, eating worms is likely to cause other children to feel disgusted toward the child. So the child, who already feels discouraged, has given up trying to be accepted and has resorted to behavior that further distances him or her from other children.

Taking Cues from Others
How does a child know what the expected or appropriate behavior is in any given situation? Expected behavior changes depending on the setting, the people present, the child’s relationship to those people, and a host of other factors. Some children observe social situations and are easily able to read the nuanced behavior of others, such as whether a serious, private conversation is taking place, or if a group is open to having another person join in. Other children have a more challenging time reading these cues, and benefit from explicit instruction in what to look for when observing others in a social setting. In our groups, we use discussion, games, role-plays, and fun activities to teach children how to recognize the distinction between expected and unexpected social behavior.

Improving one’s ability to “read” social cues is an ongoing process, one where practice plays a major role in acquiring new skills. We teach children how to act like detectives, observing behavior to glean information about what others may be thinking or feeling. A child will have an increased chance of being accepted by other children if he or she shows awareness of how their own behavior impacts others. Success in understanding this impact relies upon developing the skill of observing the reactions of others to a child’s own behavior, and learning how to understand situations from the perspective of another person. For example, if a child wants to play basketball and approaches a group of children engaged in a soccer game, using strategies to join the soccer game will be more effective than trying to get the other children to stop playing soccer and begin playing basketball.

When the “Obvious” is Anything But
Often, expected behavior is based on hidden rules that a child is just “supposed to know.” For example, some children will tell a joke, enjoy the laughter of other kids, and then repeat the joke several times. The child may not realize that what was funny once has now become annoying. This is where developing the ability to observe non-verbal cues is helpful. A child who can observe his or her audience, notice that others look disinterested or annoyed, and can modify their own behavior based on that input is honoring an important skill: the ability to observe the body language of another person and use that knowledge to maintain a comfortable social connection.

Our Approach
At Morrissey-Compton, we practice the skill of listening to peers talk about their interests, even if the topic is boring to the listener. Children learn that showing “whole body listening” will increase the likelihood that another child will reciprocate and want to listen to your stories. Listening to each other offers an opportunity to find common interests, and thus creates the foundation for building a friendship.

In our groups, children also practice skills such as identifying feelings in themselves and others and improving conversational skills, including initiating a conversation, showing interest in what others are saying, asking questions, taking turns talking, and disagreeing respectfully. Children learn how to manage anger and other strong emotions through the use of calming skills and problem-solving strategies. Our groups emphasize the importance of matching the size of one’s reaction to the size of a problem.

The Importance of Peer Interaction
A group is an opportunity for children to interact with peers and get feedback in “real time.” When conflicts arise, group leaders help children express their feelings and guide them as they work out a solution. Children are taught how to notice positive attributes of each other and strategies to decrease feelings of annoyance with others.

The Role of the Parent
Practicing social skills outside of the group room is essential to maintaining newly acquired skills, so parents are provided with strategies for reinforcing their child’s increasing social abilities. The ultimate goal of our social skills program is for group members to successfully use their new awareness and skills with peers on the playground, at school, at home, and in public.

With so many ways to support children as they learn to develop and deepen friendships, I hope that the old song, “Nobody Likes Me, Everybody Hates Me…” is on its way to becoming obsolete.
Social Skills Groups for Kids

Fall 2016 Groups for Kids

Morrissey-Compton’s ongoing skill-building groups take place at our Redwood City office (595 Price Avenue) and are for kids who struggle with issues such as making/keeping friends, impulse control, anxiety, emotion regulation, and managing stress. There are typically three to five boys or girls in a group who are close in age and have similar challenges and goals.

Stop, Relax, and Think: Managing Impulses and Strong Emotions
Grades 2 & 3: Tuesdays, 3:30 to 4:45pm
Some children need extra support to improve self-control, recognize emotions in themselves and others, and understand how their behavior affects their peers. Children will practice listening skills, and strategies to slow down and think before speaking or acting.

Conquering Anxiety and Worries
Grades 3 - 5: Wednesdays, 5 to 6:15pm
This group will help children identify their fears and understand how to manage anxiety. Children will learn to recognize the situations that trigger their worries, and will practice strategies to help decrease their anxiety.

Girl Drama!
Middle School Girls: Mondays, 5:30 to 7:30pm (meets in Palo Alto)
Note: This group is currently full; you may put your child’s name on a waiting list for the next session.
Middle school can be a very stressful time for girls, as they navigate the many social, emotional and physical changes that come with adolescence. Girls will explore friendship challenges, such as dealing with exclusion, bossy girls, and teasing or feeling like they just don’t “fit in.” This group will focus on building self-esteem, confidence, and self-advocacy.

Social Skills: Making and Keeping Friends
Grades 1 & 2: Wednesdays, 3:30 to 4:45pm
Grades 4 & 5: Mondays, 3:45 to 5pm (meets in Palo Alto)
Middle School Boys: Tuesdays, 5:30 to 6:45pm
For children who have difficulty navigating the social dynamics involved in peer relationships. Topics include active listening, perspective taking, reading social cues, noticing feelings in themselves and others, understanding how their behavior affects others, and problem solving with peers.

Executive Function Boot Camp
Four Saturdays, October 15 & 22 & November 5 & 12
Middle School: 9 to 11am
High School: 1:30pm to 3:30pm
This group will be an opportunity for older kids to develop and apply the following six executive function skills: Time management, planning and prioritizing, organization, working memory, metacognition, and goal-directed persistence. The two-week gap between classes is intentional, and gives students the chance to practice their newly-acquired skills at school and through developing individual boot camp projects.

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New! Support Group for Parents of Children Grades 4-6 with ADHD
Facilitator: Natalie Poursohrab Wager, Psy.D.
Eight Tuesdays, October 4, 11, 18, 25 & November 1, 8, 15, & 22, 6 to 7:30pm
This group is designed for parents who have children with ADHD or other behavioral difficulties. It will allow parents to discuss challenging situations and express their feelings in a safe and supportive environment. The facilitator will also have resources for stress reduction, strengthening family relations, and creating positive behavioral strategies at home.
To register for this group, contact Sue Garber, M.A. at sue.garber@morrcomp.org.

Testimonial
In a Client’s Own Words: How Social Skills Groups Helped Our Family

December 21, 2015
Dear Dr. Brenta:
I am writing to thank you for Morrissey-Compton’s support these past few months. I have been extremely grateful for everything your organization has done for our family this year.
To give you a some background, my son had been struggling with social interactions for some time. Last year, his school recommended that I find a social skills class for him. They recommended Morrissey-Compton.
To be honest, I was dubious. How could a class help him learn social skills? I was also suspicious of organizations serving Silicon Valley, in terms of being truly supportive of kids and their families. Additionally, the cost of the class was quite high for our family’s budget. However, after one semester of this class, I am a believer.
First, Morrissey-Compton is a lovely organization, whose mission truly is about supporting kids and their families. Your non-fancy office implies that your resources are being spent on staff (and your staff was spectacular). Morrissey-Compton’s commitment to helping others was also confirmed when you offered us financial aid, which made the class accessible.
Second, the class itself was tremendous. Initially, like me, my son was skeptical. Soon, however, he began to look forward to it, as the time was spent in positive ways, with lots of age-appropriate skill-building games, and lots of laughter. Following class time, I appreciated that the parents would get a run-down of what the kids worked on. The kids also got homework each week to help support them in building social and emotional skills, which seemed to really support my son’s ability to navigate social situations.
Third, the teachers were amazing, and of the highest caliber. Barb’s experience as a first grade teacher showed as she used effective strategies and approaches to help the kids learn to solve problems independently. Sue was awesome with the kids and the parents, too. I also really appreciated hearing about the results that they saw in my child with a personal meeting following the class. Overall, they have helped our family tremendously.
In the end, my child is still learning, but his social skills have improved, and I give a lot of credit to this group. As I said before, I was skeptical at the beginning, but now I am incredibly grateful to Morrissey-Compton for their efforts, and particularly for the financial help.
Thank you, again!
Sincerely,
Helen W.
now ample research confirming the benefits of mindfulness. We are a country that honors and values the benchmarks of academic achievement—test performance, forward motion through the educational system, and subject matter proficiency. But where does our society praise, or even leave room for, the development of the skills needed to become a well-rounded person? Most parents I know tell me that the one thing they desire for their child, above all success, is happiness. And yet, it can seem so elusive, especially in the context of teaching kids in a K-12 setting.

Unprecedented Stressors
I, along with other educators and personnel who work with kids on a day-to-day basis, see the triumphs and tribulations of our kids. We know that in the pursuit of academic success they are experiencing more stress, anxiety, depression, and emotional dysregulation than ever before.

More and more parents and teachers alike are becoming aware of the very real mental and physical tolls toxic stress are having on their kids. The 2010 national representative sample of over ten thousand U.S. adolescents, the ECS-A, revealed that approximately half of adolescents sampled (49.5 percent) met lifetime criteria for at least one additional mental disorder. Of this affected group, about one in four or five experienced symptoms so severe as to significantly impair their functioning across the life span.

The stark reality of these findings do, thankfully, lend way to more uplifting outcomes. The current trend of mindfulness and a movement towards mindfulness is the process of paying attention on purpose to what you are doing and what you are feeling during a single moment of time. As put even more simply by mindfully meditation pioneer Jon Kabat Zinn, “It is moment to moment awareness.” Although mindfulness has its roots in Zen, Mahayana, and Theravada Buddhism, much of the modern secular practice we know today comes from Zinn’s work. In 1979, Zinn recruited chronically ill patients who were not responding to traditional Western medical treatments to participate in an eight-week mindfulness-based stress reduction program based off of the Buddhist teachings he learned abroad. The results of his trials were astounding, and became the impetus that led Zinn to bring this practice from the East into the Western world.

Science Concors
Mindfulness has become so popular because it is a low-cost intervention that has powerful effects and can largely be customized to meet the needs of individuals. According to research done by D.S. Black and R. Fernando published in the Journal of Child and Family Studies in 2013, mindfulness practices in schools have been shown to benefit students in the areas of:

• Paying attention
• Self-control
• Classroom participation
• Respect for others

In addition, the British Journal of Psychiatry published a study by W. Kuyken, who found that a mindfulness-based program integrated into six British public schools largely lowered student depression and stress, and provided a greater sense of well-being after just nine weeks. They even found that children obtained better test scores the more they practiced the techniques taught in the program.

Giving students the tools to experience their emotions as they happen is the key to powerfully transforming challenging emotions as they arise.

Yin, Yang, and Yoga
At this point, if you’re on the Mindfulness bandwagon, you may still be wondering how Yoga plays into this big picture. Well, Yoga and Mindfulness are like the Batman and Robin of conscious awareness.

Yoga is a 3000+ year old practice of physical postures that prepare the body to more effectively practice mindfulness while seated. Additionally, it is used as a way to reconstruct habitual mental patterns by working with them on a physical level. Mindful awareness is greatly needed when practicing the postures associated with Yoga. The benefit comes in the fine detail of focusing on certain physical cues, like your breath, as well as bodily sensations, while aiming to move the body with ease into shapes that are intentionally challenging.

Yoga, for me, has always provided a space to practice becoming aware of my responses to situations that are challenging. Yoga has also been heavily studied and shown to produce a myriad of long lasting health benefits. A new report presented at the Anxiety and Depression Association of America Conference in April 2015 linked yoga to lowering levels of the stress hormone cortisol, the same that is present during times of anxiety and stress. It has also been cited by the National Institute of Health as a way to lower blood pressure, reduce depression, and boost mood.

A Personal Note
I have been a Youth Mindfulness Advocate for 10+ years now, and just as I’ve been witness to the paralyzing effect stress can have, I have seen firsthand how students can bloom and flourish with the regular utilization of yoga postures and mindful breathing. Despite the many challenges modern youth face, they are incredibly bright and resilient and work their hardest to prosper. Wellness tools like mindfulness and yoga empower students to love, take care of, and advocate for themselves. They teach that our happiness and whole-person well-being (well-being of relationships and emotional health) are equally as important as achieving academic or career success. Above all, teaching wellness sends a message to students that they matter—in a world where a lot of forces are already making them feel like they don’t.

Mindfulness for Anxiety Series
Starting this fall, Morrissey-Compton will be offering quarterly Yoga and Mindfulness Series for incoming 5th-8th graders. For more information or to sign up for a future series, please contact Madeline Harmon at madeline.harmon@morcomp.org or call (650) 322-5910.
Attention: How it Impacts Learning and Ways to Help Your Child Improve (All Ages)

Erin Powers, M.Ed., B.C.E.T.
Thursday, October 6, 6:30 to 8pm
Learn how to understand the neurodevelopmental underpinnings of attention, identify your child’s strengths and weaknesses within the area of attention, become familiar with the defining criterion for ADHD and how to recognize red flags in your children.

Parenting an Emotionally Sensitive Child (All Ages)

Erica Ragan, Ph.D.
Thursday, October 20, 6:30 to 8pm
Difficulties regulating intense emotions can lead to increased anxiety, depression, and conflict with parents, teachers, and peers. We will discuss the ways in which parents can help children learn ways to self-soothe more quickly and effectively.

Teaching Strategies to Maximize Success for Students with Executive Function Weaknesses (Ages 7-18)

Meredith Feinberg, M.Ed.
Thursday, November 17, 6:30 to 8pm
Learn about attachment concepts, basic brain development, and the emotional brain system. Strategies for establishing and deepening emotional connections with your children will be presented.

Helping Children Establish and Maintain Healthy Friendships (Grades K-6)

Laura Guthridge Chyou, Ph.D.
Thursday, December 1, 6:30 to 8pm
Help your child develop and maintain high quality friendships. Learn strategies to address common challenges that occur within children’s friendships.

Parenting Anxious Children (Ages 5-10)

A. Cassandra Golding, Ph.D.
Monday, January 16, 6:30 to 8pm
An overview of obsessive-compulsive disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, separation anxiety, social anxiety, and panic disorder in children. Learn about causes of childhood anxiety and factors that contribute to its continuance.

Half Moon Bay Class

840 Main Street, Suite B2, Half Moon Bay

call Educational Specialist Edwige Gamache, M.A., Ph.D. at 650-729-3033.

Teaching Strategies to Maximize Success for Students with Executive Function Weaknesses (Ages 7-18)

Meredith Feinberg, M.Ed.
Thursday, October 27, 6:30 to 8pm
Help your child develop strategies to improve attention, working memory, time management, planning and prioritizing, organizing materials and self-monitoring.

Connect to Correct: The Importance of Emotional Connection in Parenting (All Ages)

A. Cassandra Golding, Ph.D.
Thursday, November 17, 6:30 to 8pm
Learn about attachment concepts, basic brain development, and the emotional brain system. Strategies for establishing and deepening emotional connections with your children will be presented.

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Madeline Harmon

Morrissey-Compton Educational Center welcomes Yoga Instructor, Madeline Harmon to our team. Over the summer, she enriched students with yoga instruction at our Challenge Summer School. This fall, Madeline is developing a Yoga and Mindfulness for Anxiety course at our Redwood City office.

In addition to her time at Morrissey-Compton, Madeline works as a Health and Wellness Teacher at Brentwood Academy in East Palo Alto. In this position, she has been implementing a Health and Wellness curriculum that teaches mindfulness, stress relief, and behavior regulation for students grades K to 5. She is also assisting Stanford University and Sonima Foundation with a four-year longitudinal research study on the effectiveness of such health and wellness programs for children struggling with PTSD and trauma. Madeline’s warmth, compassion, and enthusiasm shine as she works with students, teachers, and parents to raise awareness surrounding the importance of being well and present.

Dr. Natalie Poursohrab Wager

Our newest Postdoctoral Fellow, Natalie Poursohrab Wager, Psy.D. has strong clinical training and experience in neuropsychological and psychoeducational assessments and evidence-based treatments for children, adolescents, and families. Dr. Wager received her Master’s in Clinical Psychology from Pepperdine University in 2012, and earned her Doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the Wright Institute in 2016. She completed her APA accredited predoctoral internship at Sutter Health’s California Pacific Medical Center (CPMC) in the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Department and the Kalmanovitz Child Development Center.

During her time at CPMC, Dr. Wager conducted comprehensive assessments and provided individual, group, and family psychotherapy. She worked with individuals presenting with neurodevelopmental disorders, anxiety disorders, and behavioral, social, and learning differences. Prior to that she spent two years working at Stanford University’s Center for Interdisciplinary Brain Sciences Research, where she conducted neuropsychological assessments for children with genetic disorders such as Turner Syndrome and Klinefelter Syndrome. Dr. Wager has a great interest working with children with anxiety, depression, and neurodevelopmental differences including ADHD and autism spectrum disorder. Her dissertation investigated adolescents with ADHD and how their presentations, inattention or combined, impacted specific academic functioning.

Dr. Natalie Poursohrab Wager

Dr. Natalie Poursohrab Wager is a board-certified psychiatrist who completed a fellowship in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry from Stanford University. Prior to that, he earned an M.D. from the UC Davis School of Medicine and completed a General Psychiatry Residency from the University of Texas, Southwestern.

Dr. Thomas Butler

Dr. Thomas Butler is a board-certified psychiatrist who completed a fellowship in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry from Stanford University. Prior to that, he earned an M.D. from the UC Davis School of Medicine and completed a General Psychiatry Residency from the University of Texas, Southwestern.

Dr. Butler believes in a patient-centered approach to treatment and uses evidence-based therapies including psychotherapy and medications in order to alleviate psychiatric symptoms. His research experience includes examining the safety and effectiveness of anti-depressant medications in children and adolescents. Dr. Butler has significant clinical experience treating adults and children with ADHD, Depression, Anxiety disorders, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Eating Disorders, and other psychiatric disorders.

Thomas Butler, M.D.

Thomas Butler, M.D. is a board-certified psychiatrist who completed a fellowship in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry from Stanford University. Prior to that, he earned an M.D. from the UC Davis School of Medicine and completed a General Psychiatry Residency from the University of Texas, Southwestern.

Bringing a Family Centered approach to psychiatry, Dr. Butler believes that the family is a system of psychosocial regulation. The way families function informs the way children and adolescents function. Dr. Butler emphasizes the use of evidence-based therapies and helps families understand the neurodevelopmental underpinnings of psychiatric conditions. Dr. Butler’s family-centered approach is tailored to the family’s needs and strengths, and the unique strengths and needs of the child or adolescent.

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Dr. Butl...
It is the mission of the Morrissey-Compton Educational Center to enable children and adults with learning disabilities and school-related difficulties to achieve their goals by providing the highest quality diagnostic and intervention services in a supportive environment.