Celebrating 35 Years of Challenge “Magic”

Excerpted from the “Challenge School Handbook” by Founders Patricia Morrissey, Ed.D. and Carolyn Compton, Ph.D.

“Many years ago, Lerner and Lowe…got together and wrote a musical called Brigadoon. It was about a magical place that rose out of the mists of the Scottish highlands every 100 years for just one day. Well, we have a magical place; right here in the low lands of the peninsula below the Pacific Fog. It arises every 345 days and lasts for just 20 days. It’s called Challenge…”

— Reading from Challenge School Teacher Kathryn (Lynn) Murphy at Challenge School’s 25 year celebration

Wednesday, 10:30am

A seven-year old girl stands on the playground, proudly ringing the school bell. Several children rush to the office door. It is their turn to carry the flag. The rest of the children gather at the picnic tables and stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. The children sit down and the principal speaks to the group.

“Who knows the word of the day?” Hands fly up and Michael shouts, “Observer.”


“Good for you.”

Then the principal asks Ramon to come up. Ramon, nine years old, is wearing a yellow “Tour de Challenge” shirt. The principal reminds the children that Ramon is wearing the shirt because he has been so helpful to the younger children on the playground.

continued on page 4
Dear Friends,

Since its inception, the Morrissey-Compton Educational Center has been dedicated to serving the needs of students of all ages. This issue of our newsletter highlights successful programs that fulfill this mission. First, you will have an opportunity to discover or, for some of you, rediscover Challenge School. You will see that it is not an ordinary school, but a “family” that promotes a philosophy that we are in this together and that students’ identities are multifaceted and not defined by their learning challenges. I am proud to say that we are entering our 35th year of operation. This program, designed to help students with mild to moderate learning challenges, has served more than 3,600 students since opening its doors under the leadership of Pat Morrissey and Carolyn Compton.

With the help of their newly discovered confidence, some of our past Challenge students advanced to managerial positions at Challenge School, including one who served as the School Director for a few years. Our current Challenge Director and Director of Educational Services at our clinic, Ashley Koedel, has modernized the Challenge curriculum to include students with ADHD and provide innovative support programs, such as training in mindfulness and executive function. We think that this is an ideal time to bring past, current, and future Challenge generations together, so please mark your calendar for a special picnic on Saturday, July 15 (see page 11 for details). All Challenge Family members are welcome to attend, as well as anyone else who would like to come and see what this wonderful program is all about. We are also trying to reconnect with as many alumni as possible, so if you are a former Challenge student, or know of one, please contact us to let us know how you (or they) are doing—and help us spread the word!

As this and past newsletters emphasize, we offer a variety of services that promote students’ successful functioning not only in school, but all aspects of their lives. On the next page, Ashley describes our Advocacy Services that help parents develop school support programs that meet their students’ needs. We are constantly evaluating or re-evaluating our programs to provide comprehensive support services to our clients; you’ll find a good example of this in our Social Skills Groups for Kids (pages 14-15), which form throughout the year in response to the needs of our clients. Our Free Parent Education Classes (page 13) are another example of a program that adapts its curriculum each quarter based on attendee feedback and the ongoing popularity of particular topics.

One of the challenges that all local nonprofits face is the increasing expense of living and operating in the Bay Area. As some of our staff have moved on to greener pastures in other parts of the country, I am happy to welcome several new staff members: Josslyn Koster, Erin Powers, and Pat Klein. Many of you may know Erin and Pat, who have worked in the area for a long time. With Pat, Morrissey-Compton now offers speech and language services (evaluation and therapy)—a first for us, and an example of our program development.

The economic pressures in the area are also increasing the demands on our scholarship fund as students, across all socio-economic status, are seeking the services they need in order to be successful in school. We are proud of our ability to serve all students regardless of their ability to pay, which helps to level the playing field with respect to access to services. We appreciate your support, and on behalf of our scholarship clients, thank you for helping us make a difference!

With Warmest Wishes,

John T. Brentar, Ph.D.

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Securing the Most Appropriate Educational Service Plan for Your Child

by Ashley Kinkaid Koedel, M.A., Director of Educational Services

What does an advocate do?

An advocate represents you and your child and works cooperatively with the school site team and/or school district team to develop an appropriate and effective Section 504 or IEP plan for your child. The advocate will complete a personalized review and explanation of assessment results and educational records; develop, monitor, and review IEP and 504 plans; evaluate your child’s current academic program and related services; attend any school meetings; and help you identify a more appropriate school program for your child if the current program is not working. An advocate is child-centered and helps you to fully understand your child’s rights and entitlements. They become your voice, translating students’ needs into cogent arguments as to why IEP teams must provide particular services and supports.

Advocate or Attorney?

The presence of an attorney at an IEP meeting, especially at an early stage of disagreement, often creates an adversarial atmosphere. It also often means that the school district, in return, will also bring an attorney to the meeting. Advocates know and understand the state and federal laws related to both Special Education and Section 504, but also have strong backgrounds in education and first-hand experience teaching students with special needs. At Morrissey-Compton, we also bring a thorough understanding of assessment and therapeutic and educational intervention to the table. Should you reach a place with your case where an attorney is needed, your advocate will work with you to find an experienced local special education attorney.

How do I get started?

Contact our intake coordinator, Suzy Music, at (650) 322-5910 today. A one-hour consultation is typically scheduled to begin the process.

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Advocacy

Slingerland® Summer Workshop

Why Slingerland?

If your child has been struggling with reading, spelling, writing, and/or handwriting, Slingerland’s multi-sensory, structured, sequential, and simultaneous teaching approach can help to create the connections your child needs to succeed. This intensive summer course will provide a strong foundation with the Slingerland method and will help maintain skills typically lost in summer. We will cover:

• decoding skills
• reading fluency
• comprehension
• spelling rules and generalizations
• an introduction or review of cursive handwriting

Where: Morrissey-Compton Educational Center 595 Price Avenue, Redwood City

When: Tuesdays and Thursdays, June 27 to August 10, no class on July 4. Classes will be 1.5 hours. Times will be determined as groups are formed.

Who: Incoming 1st-6th graders. Groups to be formed based on Slingerland/Orton-Gillingham experience & level based on initial assessment

Cost: $1,950 includes: 1.5 hour intake appointment/assessment, 19.5 hours of instruction, and a parent conference

For more information, please contact Adria Flores at adria.flores@morrcomp.org or (650) 322-5910
the children wait, fingers crossed, hoping their name will be called.

“Paula, will you come up, please.” Paula’s friends, in the oldest class, smile and clap. “Paula, several teachers and aides have told me how hard you are working every day on writing. Who thinks that writing is hard?” There are many nods and groans among the students.

“Paula gets to wear the yellow shirt tomorrow?” The children wait, fingers crossed, hoping their name will be called.

“Paula, gets to wear the yellow shirt tomorrow because she kept trying even when something was very hard. She showed ‘determination.’ Who remembers what ‘determination’ means? Good remembering, Alex. Come to the office tomorrow morning, Paula, and put on the yellow shirt.”

Among applause, Paula goes back to her seat. The speech therapist, Donna, comes to the front. “OK, boys and girls. We need to practice our song so that we’ll be ready for the last-day ceremony next week. Gina, DJ, Johnny, Salina, come up and help me.” A collection of aides and students of all ages come up front as the music to the song ‘When I Tell My Grandpa’ begins. The children, the teachers, the aides, the office staff, everyone sings as Donna pulls several additional children to the front to demonstrate the signs.

“You are terrific! You will be amazing at the final ceremony.” As the music dies down, the principal picks up the microphone. “Remember students, tomorrow is five-facts and math-draining day. Be sure to study your facts! All right, everyone wearing red socks is dismissed.” As the children and the staff go back to their rooms, the aides gather in the office to receive their assignments for the rest of the morning. Another Challenge Flag Ceremony has just finished.

What is this place? Is Challenge a school? A camp? A recreation program?

Origins of Tradition
Challenge was created as a five-week summer school program for children with mild to moderate learning disabilities. Founded in 1982 by Pat Morrissey and Carolyn Compton, co-directors of Morrissey-Compton Educational Center, Challenge was designed to enable children with learning problems to maintain their academic skills over the summer and to develop self-esteem in an academic setting. They were joined by Donna Dagenais, a speech-language therapist and educational specialist by profession—and an imaginative, creative person, with a gift for inspiring and teaching children.

The Admissions Process
The admissions interviews were a crucial first step in determining whether Challenge was a good fit for a family. While the principal worked with the child, another administrator gathered information from the parents and discussed the Challenge schedule, activities, and goals:

• To review skills expected at the child’s grade level and not mastered and to teach strategies and new ways to do the work.
• To introduce skills that will be covered in the beginning of the next grade so that the child will have a little familiarity with the task.
• To help children gain confidence in their academic skills.

Meanwhile, in another room, the principal got to know the child. Although academic tasks were used as one vehicle, they were far less important than the child’s interaction skills and interests, as these were the factors that determined what group was best fitted for that child. The principal showed the child the Summer Book from the previous year, explained the activities and the theme for the upcoming summer, and told the child that this is a school “by invitation only.” If she was fairly certain that this child was appropriate for Challenge, she would end the interview with a personal invitation: “I think you would be a good Challenge student, and I am inviting you to come, but first we have to talk with your parents.” The interview closed with the child, the parents, and the two staff members meeting together.

These interviews were essential, as they enabled the principal to know all the children and their parents and to form appropriate classroom groups. Not every child was determined to be a good fit for Challenge, but those who did had one thing in common: They were not eager to go to summer school! Many children had to be dragged by their parents. “And now,” says the principal, “Who will wear the yellow shirt tomorrow?” The children wait, many nodding, many saying they thought they could do it.

The Staff
Initially, Pat and Carolyn hired teachers they had known from Menlo Park School District and Children’s Health Council. They all had credentials and experience with special education students within the classroom setting—as well as great teaching skills, high energy, and flexibility, as the Challenge program required all three! The staff worked together to carry out the program, sharing materials and ideas for working with challenging students.

The Aides Program
The Aides Program began simply enough, when one Challenge student became too old for the classes but wanted to continue and was hired to do office jobs such as copying, straightening up, etc. She was also assigned to work with a first grade student whose math skills were below the rest of the class. She was so effective, and he was so excited to work with her, that he was willing to do math practice that he had previously avoided. The founders quickly learned the value of having older students with learning disabilities work with younger students.

Each year, former Challenge students applied to be aides-in-training as they were completing eighth grade. The position was seen as an opportunity for a student to have a first job in a familiar, safe environment. After two or three years, most aides-in-training graduated to full aide positions, and many continued as aides through high school and college. In addition to providing teaching organizational strategies and carrying out fun, all-class activities. One of the co-directors would often teach a class for an hour or so, allowing the teacher to observe in another classroom. The staff became a cohesive group who shared ideas, learned from each other, and really cared about each child. The continuity of the staff added greatly to the program’s success.

We very much want to reconnect with former Challenge students, parents, staff, and aides! Please turn to page 11 for details regarding a special reunion event!

We look forward to seeing you all there.

The Challenges of Challenge
The challenge of Challenge was often “I’ve been invited, but… What now?” To introduce skills that will be covered in the next grade, when one Challenge student became too old for the program, the staff had to be creative to re-engage the student. They showed the child that working with a first grade student was a natural continuation of the spirit of friendship that was fostered during their time as students.

Continued on next page
educational support, these aides acted as mentors to the students. Under teacher direction, they worked with individual students in the classroom, led playground activities, and helped with special projects. Most of all, they were high-energy teenagers who brought a lot of enthusiasm and fun to the program. And an unintended outcome was the model of success the aides portrayed that was so critical not only for the students, but for the parents and teachers.

Scholarships and Diversity

Initially, Challenge School did not have the ability to offer any financial aid and was made up largely of Caucasian students from middle-class families. The Board of Directors recognized this lack of diversity and discussed the need to develop financial support that would allow more families an opportunity to take advantage of the school’s program. Their first effort was to reach out to Beechwood School in East Menlo Park, where they found a group of children who would benefit from Challenge. At the same time, the Board and Morrissey-Compton staff organized a luncheon to raise money for scholarships. Since then, thanks to ongoing donations, families of many ethnicities and financial circumstances have been able to enjoy Challenge and benefit from its unique curriculum.

Classroom and Curriculum

Challenge Summer School had to be different—quickly. The overall goal was to create an academic environment in which children could experience success. Several elements were key in planning the classroom program.

First, the lessons had to be fun. In one class, finding as many little words as you could in the word of the day (“participate”) ended with everyone crumpling their paper and throwing it into the basketball hoop attached to the waste basket. In another class, girls and boys were divided into teams in a math contest. Vocabulary practice involved teams receiving points for good definitions, and students were encouraged to use the words throughout the day.

Also, the lessons had to look age-appropriate. The teacher who passed out a paper that reviewed basic addition and subtraction facts would quickly hear, “I’ve already done that.” But the teacher who began by saying, “I know this is a hard assignment, but I think you can do it,” sparked much more interest. The work included problems such as 37,926 + 74,053. The lesson was the same—review of basic addition facts—but the child’s motivation and attention to the task was much greater.

Given that many of the children had difficulties maintaining attention for academic tasks, short lessons that were brought to a close with some kind of evaluative process were encouraged. For example, students would write the meaning of the word of the day, followed by each child creating a sentence using the word and then writing a sentence on the board, was more successful than a written assignment that required each child to work independently.

Each year, the curriculum was built around a topical theme such as The Olympics, Architecture, Famous Landmarks, or Children Who Made a Difference. The theme had two major purposes. First, to unify the school, allowing teachers to share materials and develop cross-grade activities. Care was taken to select a theme that was not standard in the public schools. The other purpose was to provide a framework for presenting basic skills in an interesting way. The theme became an integral part of Challenge. Aides would recall their years at Challenge by saying such things as “I was here the year we did ‘Around the World in 80 Days,’” and I still have my passport!"

Another part of the curriculum that grew in importance over the years was Word of the Day. The word, selected from the theme, was the same for the whole school and was posted on the main bulletin board. Children learned to check it as they came in each morning. Sixth graders and first graders alike learned the meaning of “determination” or “rotation.” To effectively maintain retention, teachers were encouraged to present the word orally, discuss its meaning, and have each child give a “good” sentence (orally or by writing it on the board). Most important, the words were repeated every day and points were given to the whole class when any child used the word orally beyond the classroom.

In the Word of the Day competition at the end of the summer, it was noted that many children could name all the words of the day, obviously a memory task, while others, if you gave them the word, could give you the meaning—a vocabulary task. To try to bring these two skills together, teachers taught the children to group the words, to create a mnemonic for the four words of the week, and to recite them every day. These strategies, categorization and mnemonics, are skills that the children would use throughout their schooling. At the end of the summer, many of the children were able to recall all 19 words of the summer and match them with their meanings. How proud they were—and so was the staff.

School, or Camp?

Many students and parents have referred to Challenge as a camp. Several factors contributed to this feeling:

1. The spirit of camaraderie was deliberately developed and nurtured. “We are all in this together” was a common theme. Sixty-plus students who had all struggled in school and wondered, “Will I make it?” and their parents, who had wondered the same thing, built a bond. Even the words of the Challenge theme song echoed this sentiment: “It is such a long road…but when you put your heart in it, anything can happen.”

2. The returns. The traditional camp farewell, “See you next summer!” was true. Often, half of the children returned the following summer, and many came for four or five years. This allowed children to make enduring friendships. And almost all of the teachers, office staff, and aides returned as well.

3. The consistency of the aides from summer to summer was a major factor in the “camp-like” feeling. In camps, campers grow up to be junior counselors and then counselors. At Challenge, students became aides-in-training, then aides. Students saw this progression and were eager to return.

The Traditions

Challenge has a saying: “Be careful. If you do something once, it will become a tradition.” Each one started as an opportunity to build self-esteem.

The Green Hat Drawing

The green hat drawing is a good example. During the week, each class studied the theme, including the Words of the Day. Each teacher prepared five facts for his or her class to learn. On Thursdays, an aide met with each child individually and asked them the five facts their class had studied. Aides became skillful in asking the questions in such a way that the child was sure to answer.

Tell us what Challenge School has meant to you and your family! Email lyn.balistreri@morrcomp.org.
It's full of laughter and smiles. I often tell everyone I meet "Challenge creates this loving, supportive, and fun environment where students learn and it is a way for me to learn and observe. It is a great opportunity to be in a classroom by helping others, no matter what our differences. I love being an aide because I was a student for three years at Challenge. Coming back as an aide is an amazing experience and a lot of fun! Challenge makes everyone feel safe and welcoming no matter what your background."

"I was a student for three years at Challenge. Coming back as an aide is an amazing experience and a lot of fun! Challenge makes everyone feel safe and welcoming no matter what your background."

"Challenge draws really good teachers. Each summer the teachers seem to have a plan and they make it fun. You actually have fun learning things. That's what's magical."

"The aides are the magic of Challenge. The children are told that the aides were former Challenge students and most of them probably think about becoming one. When someone asked my son during his last year if he was going to apply to be an aide, he was very proud to think that he could be."

"The amount of friends you can make is never-ending. You may know no one, and all of a sudden, you have friends. In public school I felt I had to perform higher than I could. The magic of Challenge brings people back, we are all one family."

"School was always something that wasn't pleasant. You just had to do it. Challenge was called school. It was a place with classrooms, and teachers. Therefore, you expected it be another not very pleasant situation. The magic comes when the expectation is not the reality. Challenge was a place where exciting things happened even in learning. Challenge was a place that was safe to be who you were, whatever that was."

Oh Ho, It's Magic, You Know...Never Believe it's Not So!

Students, staff, and parents often talk about the "Magic of Challenge”—a magic that is different for each person. Here are some examples:

"Challenge summer school has amazing teachers that help us learn difficult things in an easier way than regular school. We can earn yellow t-shirts by being really good and we get recognized by the whole school. They make school really fun and I really, really, really enjoy it and want to go back every single year!!!"

"I was a student for three years at Challenge. Coming back as an aide is an amazing experience and a lot of fun! Challenge makes everyone feel safe and welcoming no matter what our differences. I love being an aide because I was a student for three years at Challenge. Coming back as an aide is an amazing experience and a lot of fun! Challenge makes everyone feel safe and welcoming no matter what your background."

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Whether or not you are a Challenge alumni, you are invited to experience the magic for yourself at our special reunion event! See page 11.

Celebrating 35 Years of Challenge “Magic”

As the summer drew to a close, there was a tradition that always seemed to be remembered. Every year, a group of students would gather near the flagpole at 10 a.m. The principal would pull names from a hat, and the selected student would be awarded the yellow shirt for the day. This tradition became known as the "Tour de Challenge"—a magic that is different for each student. Students, staff, and parents often talk about the "Magic of Challenge"—a magic that is different for each person. Here are some examples:

"Challenge draws really good teachers. Each summer the teachers seem to have a plan and they make it fun. You actually have fun learning things. That's what's magical."

"The aides are the magic of Challenge. The children are told that the aides were former Challenge students and most of them probably think about becoming one. When someone asked my son during his last year if he was going to apply to be an aide, he was very proud to think that he could be."

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Parents supported the student who got stage fright and needed Donna’s help to finish the act. The school’s inclusiveness and camaraderie were readily apparent.

Parent Communication
Parent-school communication was a key part of Challenge School. Every Thursday, each teacher sent home a one-page letter to all the parents of his or her class describing what had happened during the week and what was coming up next. Informal but important communication took place every day as parents dropped off and picked up their children. During the fourth week, parent-teacher conferences were held. Because Challenge is not a public school, teachers could make recommendations that public school teachers felt they could not, such as counseling, tutoring, or further evaluation of attention problems. Parents felt supported by the Challenge staff and were often more open to recommendations.

Later that summer, the parents received a written report describing the classroom program and the child’s response to specific academic skills that were taught. The child’s needs in each area were addressed, and with the student’s next teacher as well as the parents in mind, very specific individual recommendations were made. For many parents, their child’s participation in Challenge was the beginning of a long-term relationship with Morrissey-Compton Educational Center. Challenge staff talked with new teachers in the fall, administrators attended IEP meetings, and parents came to the Center whenever a school
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Celebrating 35 Years of Challenge “Magic”

Given this philosophy of competition, it was inevitable that the summer session would end with opportunities for children to compete in academic skills. The children quickly let the directors know that there needed to be sports competitions as well. At the beginning of the fourth week of school, students were given a menu of choices: six academic events, and six non-academic events. They signed up for two events of each type. The array of events was planned to ensure that each student would win at least two ribbons. Where appropriate, events had levels according to age; for other events, cross-grade teams were formed.

The Last Day

It was not by accident that the last word of the day became “final,” the last act. At 9:15, the ceremony began. Aides walked with the children from their classrooms. Music played as students walked down the center aisle past their parents who were standing and clapping. After the Pledge of Allegiance, the principal talked to the children, reminding them of their hard work and their successes. She thanked the parents for sharing their “wonderful children” with the entire staff for the summer.

The awards ceremony began with the non-academic events. As their names were called, each child came up onto the stage and received their ribbon from an aide. Between the non-academic and academic awards, Donna led the children in singing and signing “Proud to Be an American.” Children who had half-heartedly participated at practice sessions proudly signed in front of their parents. After the ribbons came the longevity pins, awarded to children and staff who had attended for three or more years. One year, Allyson, who started as a student and became an aide-in-training, aide, and then a teacher, received her 24-year pin! The awarding of the pins was a visible tribute to the “lastingsness” of Challenge School, and parents were incredulous at the stability of this small program. The children, led by Donna, sang and signed “When You Put Your Heart In It,” and tears flowed.

Next came the Special Awards, such as the Spirit Awards and Most Improved Students. The Theme Award was given to five or six students who did their best every day. Lastly, the Student of the Year Award was given to one student who exemplified all the Challenge values. He or she received a special medal, and their name was engraved on the Challenge plaque.

Back in their classrooms, children received their last school newspaper and Summer Book. The Last Day concluded with a picnic cooked by Challenge Aides. As everyone dispersed, the words “See you next year” were heard amidst autographs and hugs.

A Legacy of Togetherness

Challenge was developed to meet the needs of a group of students who found school difficult and unrewarding. As the founders and staff worked together to improve their skills and self-esteem, Challenge became a community of people who respected and enjoyed each other…and had fun!

35th Annual Challenge Summer School

Monday, June 19 - Thursday, July 20, 2017
8:30am - 2:00pm
Location: 468 Grand Street, Redwood City

For information, call (650) 322-5910, email summer@challenge@gmail.com, or visit www.morrissey-compton.org/summer_school.php.

Theme: Inventions

Calling all Challenge Alumni (and More)

Let’s Keep the “Magic” Going This Year, and for Generations to Come

Challenge School has always been one of the Peninsula’s best-kept secrets. During this, its 35th year, we plan to change that, with a goal of reaching even more families benefit from this wonderful program in the future.

Whether you are a past, current, or (perhaps) future Challenge student, teacher, parent, student, or aide—or just somebody who would like to come and see what this amazing program is all about—please plan to join us on the afternoon of Saturday, July 15 for a picnic at a local venue. Details will be provided in the summer newsletter, as well as via email and text updates.

Seeking Early Students

While Challenge School began in 1983, Morrissey-Compton did not receive its first computer until years later, so our records are incomplete. We want to reconnect with those who experienced the magic during the early years!

Who to Contact

For information, to be added to our mailing list, or to tell us what Challenge School meant to you and your family, email lyn.balistreri@morrscomp.org or call (408) 396-8953.

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Jossolyn Koster, Educational Specialist

Jossolyn Koster, M.A. joined the Morrissey-Compton family in February. Jossolyn provides diagnostic evaluations, consultations, group services, and educational therapy focusing on writing and executive function.

Prior to coming to Morrissey-Compton she was Director of C2 Education, a learning center in Menlo Park; a general and special education teacher; and an ABA Assistant. Jossolyn received her Bachelor’s Degree in Sociology from Hofstra University. After some years in higher education, she completed her Masters in 2014 and is pursuing a doctorate in Education with the University of San Francisco. Having been a classroom teacher in both middle and high school classrooms and in both mainstream and special instruction programs, Jossolyn understands the importance of personalizing coaching and instruction to meet the needs of all learners. She is well versed in teaching, testing, and group therapeutic interventions and enjoys working with all ages and dispositions. She is married to a former Army Medic who now works in the ER at Seton Medical Center. A New York native, she is new to the Bay Area.

Pat Klein, Speech and Language Pathologist

Patricia (Pat) K. Klein, M.A, CCC (Certificate of Clinical Competency) works out of our Redwood City Office. She joined the Morrissey-Compton team in January after the Mid-Peninsula Speech and Language Clinic (MPSLC) closed in December.

Pat began working at MPSLC in June, 1991 when she moved to Palo Alto from Southern California. In addition to seeing patients at the clinic, she directed the Speech and Language Department at Lucile Salter Packard Children’s Hospital until 2003. In that position she participated in the Infant Development Follow-up Clinic, assessed and provided therapy for in- and out-patients, supervised speech and language fellows, and participated in multi-disciplinary teams in Santa Clara and San Mateo County. Prior to her move to Northern California she was an infant specialist for the Conejo Valley Unified School District, where she provided individual therapy in homes and as well as a group program based in an elementary school. Her experience has been in all areas of her field including public school therapy (both individual and self-contained classes) for Los Angeles City and County schools, adult therapy in extended care facilities, hospital-based therapy, and an adjunct professor at California State University in Los Angeles and Northridge California (Ventura campus). She has particular interest and experience with non-verbal children as young as 18 months and toddlers and preschoolers with verbal dyspraxia. She works part-time providing speech and language evaluations and therapy.

Erin Powers, Educational Specialist

Erin Powers, M.A. has been a practicing Educational Therapist for more than 25 years. She has coordinated learning services for Kehillah Jewish High School for the past five years, and maintains a thriving private practice.

Erin previously directed all of the learning services at the Carey (elementary) School and Cathedral School for Boys in San Francisco. In each independent school, she provided services and support to students with learning differences, working in partnership with parents and faculty.

In addition, Erin teaches courses in Educational Therapy through the University of California Extension Program at Santa Cruz, with varied class offerings ranging from “Introduction to Educational Therapy” to “ADHD in the Classroom- for Teachers.” Ms. Powers holds a B.A. in Psychology from UC Santa Cruz as well as a Masters of Education in Special Education from San Francisco State University. She further holds two California Teaching Credentials, one which is multi-subject and another in Special Education with an emphasis on Learning Handicapped. Additionally, Erin is certified as both a Resource Specialist and is a Board Certified Educational Therapist.

To schedule an appointment with any of our gifted clinical staff, call Intake Coordinator Suzy Music at (650) 322-5910 or visit www.morrcomp.org.
Demand Reflects Effectiveness of Morrissey-Compton’s Skill-Building Groups for Kids

As parents have come to recognize the difficulties modern children are facing in this fast-paced world, and in the wake of a very successful track record, Morrissey-Compton’s Skill-Building Groups for Kids have become increasingly sought-after. 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. We pay special attention to generalizing learning at both home and school. Content is individualized depending on the ages, developmental levels, and goals of the children in the group. Groups meet for 75-minute sessions, depending on the ages, to five boys or girls in a group. Groups are formed year-round, depending on need. So if you have a child who might benefit from one of the groups described on the next page, please fill out our online form. We will make every effort to accommodate your need.

Our NEW online form is available at morrissey-compton.org/group_programs.php. All information provided will be kept confidential.

A group is an opportunity for your child to interact with other children 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.

A Collaborative Effort

In some groups, the parent(s) who pick up the child may join the group for the last ten minutes, and the children help teach the parents the concepts and skills that have been learned. This builds self-confidence in the children and provides parents with the same content that their children are learning. In groups of younger children, this time is used for supervised play and parent conferences.

Practicing social skills outside of the group is essential to maintaining newly acquired skills, so it is important that parents are provided with strategies for reinforcing their child’s increasing social competence. 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, home and in public.

Interested in a Future Group?

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Available Groups

Conquering Anxiety & Worries

Many children have anxiety or worry that is more intense than is typical for the particular situation, causing them to feel distressed. In this group, children will learn how to identify their worries and practice strategies to effectively cope, such as how to observe what situations “trigger” their anxious feelings and how to manage the trigger. Children will learn how to identify the way that anxiety feels in their body as a step toward being able to intervene before anxious feelings escalate. Some of the strategies taught and practiced will include how to prepare for a situation that is likely to be anxiety-provoking, mindfulness and breathing techniques, progressive muscle relaxation, self-talk, challenging beliefs/fears to determine how likely they are to occur, and a step-by-step method to generate and evaluate specific actions for solving problems. Through discussion, role-plays, games, activities, YouTube clips, and lots of practice, children will become increasingly effective at conquering anxiety.

Stop, Relax, & Think: Managing Impulses and Strong Emotions

Some children need extra support to improve self-control, recognize emotions in themselves and others, and understand how their behavior affects their peers. We will practice listening skills and strategies to slow down and think before speaking or acting.

Social Skills: Making & Keeping Friends

Children learn and practice skills such as identifying feelings in themselves and others, reading non-verbal cues, conversational skills (showing interest in what others are saying, asking questions, taking turns talking, disagreeing respectfully), anger management, calming skills, problem solving strategies including matching the size of a reaction to the size of a problem, and impulse control.

Participate in Our EF Study! Executive Function Research Program

What is the purpose of the study?

What are the benefits to participating?

Who are we looking for to participate?

What are the benefits to participating?

We will provide a short summary of the student’s cognitive and academic strengths and weaknesses. Participants who complete the study will enter a raffle to win a $150 Amazon Gift Card!

Contact Us ASAP

Email Surina.basho@morrcomp.org or call (650) 322-5910 x110

Research Associate: Dr. Rita Lopez
Principal Investigator: Dr. Surina Basho

Study Location: Morrissey-Compton Educational Center, 595 Price Avenue, Redwood City, CA

Who are we looking for to participate?

• 8–16 year olds
• Students with NO EF difficulties, learning disabilities, ADHD, autism, anxiety, depression, or any other neurodevelopmental disorder

Consider the html emphasized information: In groups, the parent(s) who pick up the child may join the group for the last ten minutes, and the children help teach the parents the concepts and skills that have been learned. This builds self-confidence in the children and provides parents with the same content that their children are learning. In groups of younger children, this time is used for supervised play and parent conferences.
Executive Director
John T. Brentar, Ph.D.

Director of Educational Services
Ashley Kinkaid Koedel, M.A.

Senior Educational Specialist
Erin Shinn Berg, M.Ed.

Educational Specialists
Kathleen Button, M.Ed.
Susan Chait, M.A.
Meredith Feinberg, M.Ed.
Adria Flores, M.A.
Edwige Gamache, M.A., Ph.D.
Emilie Potter Jobson, M.A.
Raymond Jones, Ph.D.
Jossoyn Koster, M.A.
Erin Powers, M.A.
C. Priya Tjerandsen, M.A.
Robert Urowsky, M.A.

Psychologists
Ted Alper, Ph.D.
Ginger Brudos, Ph.D.
Laura Chyou, Ph.D.
Janet Dafoe, Ph.D.
Cassandra Goldberg, Ph.D.
Will Martinez, Ph.D.
Erica Ragan, Ph.D.
Heather Taylor, Ph.D.

Psychiatrist
Thomas Butler, M.D.

Director of Research
Surina Basho, Ph.D.

Director of Parent Education and Social Skills Groups
Sue Garber, M.A.

Postdoctoral Fellows
Lorgetta Abbott, Psy.D.
Natalie Poursohrab Wager, Psy.D.

Speech and Language Pathologist
Patricia (Pat) K. Klein, M.A, C.C.C.

Therapist
Sarah Hoxie, L.C.S.W.

Tutor
Bill Nielsen

Yoga Instructor
Madeline Harmon

Director of Fund Development
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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.