



A not-for-profit 501(c)(3) corporation

Summer 2016

In this issue

From the Director
page 2

Coastal Business
pages 4 - 5

Mitzvahs, Fundraising,
and Inspiration
pages 6-7

Our New Vocational
Program
pages 8-9

When is the Right Time
to Seek an Assessment?
(Part Two)
pages 10-12

Is Brain Training Worth
the Investment?
page 13

This Edition's New
Additions
page 14

Slingerland in the
Summertime
page 15

Tips for Applying to College

by Deborah Moritz, Ph.D., Peninsula Pathways to College

Although the headlines about college admissions make it sound like getting into a good college is close to impossible, the vast majority of the 2,200 public and private four-year college and universities in the U.S. actually admit more than half of their applicants. As you and your students/children start thinking about the college application or process, the goal should be for them to apply to schools that provide a good fit—academically, financially, socially, and geographically—not the schools with the biggest names or the lowest acceptance rates.

Be Engaged, and Be Your Best, But Above All, Be You!

The best way for students to prepare for college is to immerse themselves in the high school experience—finding activities, classes, and friends they enjoy. It doesn't make sense to pursue activities that might "look good" to colleges; students will thrive and stand out when they are fully engaged, so you should encourage them to find activities that are truly meaningful to them. Academic performance and rigor during the high school years are the most important factors in determining college admission. Therefore, it is important to choose appropriate classes that pose a reasonable level of challenge. Does your child need to take every AP class offered at his/her school? No, it's better to choose AP or advanced classes in subjects that truly interest them. And they should work with their high school counselors to make sure they're meeting the UC/CSU "a-g" requirements. And finally, here is something you don't hear too much during the college application process: they should try to achieve balance in their lives, leaving time for family, friends, and relaxation.



continued on page 3



Dear Friends,

It's my pleasure to present our Summer Newsletter. It's a little longer than usual because we have a lot of information to convey!

Summer for many people is a time to relax, enjoy the longer days, and perhaps take a vacation. At Morrissey-Compton, summer has become one of our busiest seasons. **Challenge School** is operating at full capacity in our new location in Redwood City, with a program redesigned to incorporate a greater emphasis on building executive function skills in our students. We will also be offering a number of groups for children this summer (page 15) that include social skills training, behavioral and emotional regulations, and **Slingerland® Workshops** for students with language-based academic challenges. It is also a busy time for assessments, since many students prefer to be tested during the summer when they have more free time in their schedules or to make fall deadlines for accommodations on college entrance exams. Our cover story, "Tips for Applying to College," offers suggestions to students and their parents to help simplify the college admission process. We also include the second part of **Dr. Karen Dearing's** article, "When is the Right Time to Seek an Assessment?" on page 10 to help parents decide when to seek an evaluation.

I am also proud to announce the start of our new **Vocational Assessment Program** designed for high schoolers and young adults who are struggling to decide about potential career paths. As our article (page 8) describes, young adults are facing increasing challenges in deciding on majors in college that will lead to a successful career path in a new high-tech work environment. Some students select majors by default without careful consideration of whether it will be helpful in securing jobs that they desire. Our Vocational Assessment Program will help students narrow their options based on interests and assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. For more information, please contact our intake coordinator at (650) 322-5910.

At Morrissey-Compton, the staff is dedicated to providing quality services that meet the needs of the students and families who seek help. There is nothing more powerful than when the students or families we serve take the time and energy to give back to Morrissey-Compton. On page 4, you will read about a fundraiser for our Half Moon Bay office that was proposed, organized, and delivered by one of our students. This project of creating Mother's Day baskets was a joint effort by a number of young students we serve through our satellite office. I am also thankful to **Gabe** (page 6) who selected Morrissey-Compton as his philanthropy project at his school. I proudly and very gratefully accepted his check for \$1,461 at an event held at his school in May. Finally, on page 7 we have a letter from **Angela**, the parent of a child with learning challenges, who expresses her gratitude for receiving financial aid through our Scholarship Program and services for her son. I am deeply appreciative to Angela, Gabe, and our students in Half Moon Bay for the taking the time to help Morrissey-Compton.

Our ability to provide services to students like those in Half Moon Bay and Angela's son is directly related to the dedication of our donor families to help students in need. Your generosity was particularly evident on May 3, where during **Silicon Valley Gives** we raised the most money of any nonprofit in our category, thereby earning a special bonus grant of **\$40,000**. Thank you to all of you who gave on that day or who contribute to us throughout the year. I hope you enjoy our newsletter!

Warm Regards,

John T. Brentar, Ph.D.

Tips for Applying to College

continued from page 1

College Research

There are many books and websites where students can read about the wealth of college options. Some of my favorite books are:

- *The Fiske Guide to Colleges* (hard copy or e-version)
- *College Admission* (Mamlet and Vandeveld)
- *The Complete Book of Colleges* (Princeton Review).

Some excellent websites include:

- bigfuture.collegeboard.org (for general info)
- nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator (a resource from the Federal government)
- thecollegesolution.com (for financial aid advice)
- Naviance.com

For students who know what major they would like to pursue, there is substantial information on the departmental websites for each potential college or university. **For those with learning disabilities, it is important to work with their learning specialists to find schools with the appropriate levels of learning support.**

Standardized Tests

Keep in mind that standardized test scores comprise only one of many factors that colleges consider. There are many test prep agencies in our community as well as excellent online test prep. Khan Academy has partnered with the College Board, which administers

the SAT and SAT subject tests, to provide free SAT test preparation (khanacademy.org/test-prep). In addition, Kaplan has recently announced a partnership with ACT for live, online test preparation starting in the fall, projected to cost less than \$200, and free for students who qualify for an ACT fee waiver. For students who do not test well, over 800 schools are now test-optional. A relatively small number of schools require SAT subject tests. Make sure your students know the requirements for their schools of interest.

Summer Activities

It is a good idea for teens to do something meaningful during their summers, especially the summer after junior year. Meaningful is very broadly defined; they can get a summer job (e.g. babysitting, working in a store or restaurant, being a camp counselor, doing research in a lab), pursue a new interest, help take care of a younger sibling, do volunteer work, read a series of books, take an existing skill or talent to a higher level, or learn a new instrument.



The possibilities are limitless, but do *not* include sitting on the couch playing video games, hanging out at the mall, or even pursuing SAT/ACT test prep (which is necessary, but does not comprise a meaningful summer activity). Remind your students to leave space for down time and relaxation. They need the summer to re-charge. For juniors, this is a good time to write a draft of their essays for the common application and UCs. The more work they get done over the summer, the less stressful fall will be.

The Last Word

With some preparation, the college application period can be a time of exploration and self-reflection. It does not have to be solely one gigantic stressor!

Questions/Consultation

The good news is there are college admissions consultants and others in the community to help guide you through this process of applying for college.

If you have questions or would like to schedule a free half-hour consultation with the author of this article, please email Deborah Moritz at penpathcollege@gmail.com and be sure to visit her Facebook page, [facebook.com/debbie.moritz.24](https://www.facebook.com/debbie.moritz.24), where she posts tips and articles of interest to the college-bound.

Recent Happenings in Half Moon Bay

In the midst of milestones and transitions, Morrissey-Compton's Half Moon Bay satellite office continues to find new ways to enrich education in coastal communities.



Chamber Music (to Our Ears)

To commemorate the office's **fifth anniversary**, the Half Moon Bay Coastside Chamber of Commerce recently recognized Morrissey-Compton for its "valuable contributions and support." Our Half Moon Bay staff members **Bill Nielsen, Edwige Gamache, Emilie Jobson, and Denali St. Amand** (l-r in photo) do a fabulous job with helping students reach their goals and sustaining a dedicated and energetic partnership with parents, schools, and community.

A Unique Fundraiser to Benefit Latino Students

To support our Latino Families Outreach Program on the coast, **Raul Hernandez** created a very special fundraiser at the Half Moon Bay office. He and **Denali St. Amand** organized and led a sale of Mother's Day baskets and gift bags. A dedicated team of our Latino students, with their families on hand for support, provided heartfelt energy by crafting cards and origami



Juan and Michael create origami works of art.

decorations and arranging gift items generously donated by local businesses. With their eyes on the goal, our eager students sold **50** gift bags to the community, along with six raffle baskets, proudly earning **\$1,250!** We hope you enjoy these scenes that capture the fun and energy that went into this effort.

Raul, Vanessa, and Vanessa's father assemble lavender sachets.

Brian and Jerry write thank you notes.



The kids are proud of a job well done!

Special thanks to the following local businesses for their support: **Bamboo Hair and Body, glassblower Doug Brown, Half Moon Honey Co., Half Moon Bay Salt Water Taffy Co., The Hallmark Store, New Leaf Market, Mandala Treasures, Peets, Rite Aid, Tokenz, Toque Blanche, and Michael's Crafts** (on Woodside Road in Redwood City).

Staff Transitions

We are sorry to announce that **Denali St. Amand, Ph.D.** will be leaving Morrissey-Compton in July. Denali has been our office manager in Half Moon Bay for more than three years. An avid cheerleader for services on the coast, she was instrumental in developing our Outreach to Latino Families Program and worked hard at establishing collaborative relationships with schools and other organizations along the coast. Her tireless efforts have undoubtedly contributed to our success there, and we will miss her ever-present smile, positive attitude, and "can do" spirit. She will be moving to Southern California to be closer to family, but we hope to see her on visits to the Bay Area.

We are fortunate to have another dedicated educational specialist, **Edwige Gamache, Ph.D.** take on Denali's managerial responsibilities in Half Moon Bay. Edwige has worked with us as a bilingual tutor for approximately two years. She was born, raised, and educated in France, Spain, and the U.S., earning a Master's in Spanish Applied Linguistics from the Universidad de Jaén in Spain and a Ph.D. in Romance Linguistics, French Literature, and Cultures from UC Berkeley. Edwige also teaches Romance Languages at a local school and lives on the coast in Montara with her family. During her time with us, Edwige has shown a strong commitment to and enthusiasm for our coastal initiatives, and we are very happy to "pass the baton" to another educator who shares our vision.



Denali's creative teaching techniques have helped many students. Here, she and Michael use an engaging historical biography of Milton Hershey to practice reading comprehension strategies and vocabulary building—and take the opportunity to indulge their mutual taste for chocolate!

Staff Shout-Outs

The Half Moon Bay staff extends a most grateful thank-you to **John Brentar** and the late **Rudie Tretten** for their vision and instrumental support in the establishment and growth of the office. We would also like to thank **Lyn Balistreri, Sue Garber, Erin Shinn Berg,** and the rest of the **Redwood City staff** and our **Board of Directors**, who have contributed to the success of the Morrissey-Compton Half Moon Bay satellite office. Now on to the next five years!

Branching Out

This spring, our mission to help students achieve their learning potential reached the La Honda/Pescadero School District, where Denali helped several elementary, middle, and high school students understand their own learning profiles. In so doing, these students have the tools they need to create individualized strategies to leverage their learning strengths against their struggles. She and the principals, **Pat Talbot** and **Erica Hays**, are collaborating closely to implement the project

in this remarkable and unique coastal school community.

A Summertime Learning Boost

To kick off its sixth year, the office held a three-day class for third, fourth, and fifth-graders from June 20 to 23. Through both individual and group activities, students polished their skills in reading comprehension, writing, and vocabulary building.

All for Parent Ed, and Parent Ed for All

The office is currently collaborating with the Half Moon Bay Library to create a new type of Parent Education for the community. Moving forward, each class will be bilingual. With cutting-edge technology provided by the library, both English- and Spanish-speaking parents will enjoy our expert presentations together in real time. The first class, "Brain and Cognitive Development in Children 0-3," was held by **Dr. Will Martinez** on May 16.

Morrissey-Compton Half Moon Bay
840 Main Street, Suite B2, 94019
(650) 729-3033



You are Generous, Indeed... in Words AND Deed!

In addition to helping us raise a record amount for our organization, our donors really made our year with their comments during Silicon Valley Gives. Here are a few:

"Your parent education classes really helped me understand my child's challenges and advocate for him."
—L.W.

"We will always be grateful to Dr. Janet Dafoe and Dr. John Brentar. Both of them gave our son the confidence and skills to develop into an extraordinary young man. Now it is time for us to pay it forward!"
—A.K.

"Thank you for helping my kids and so many others!"
—K.F.

"The tutoring my son has received through Morrissey-Compton has made a tremendous difference—in his reading and his confidence. It is incredibly gratifying as a parent to see the growth and, honestly, the joy my son feels as he tackles reading with newfound confidence and tools."
—K.S.

"Our family is forever grateful for Morrissey-Compton!!!"
—D.V.

We Asked, You Gave, and...WOW! Just Wow.

by Lyn Balistreri, Director, Fund Development

Through matching grants, prizes, and other incentives, **Silicon Valley Community Foundation's** third annual 24-hour online giving event, **Silicon Valley Gives**, provided almost 1,000 local participating nonprofits with the opportunity to maximize their fundraising—an opportunity that, as it happens, worked out extremely well for the individuals and families who need Morrissey-Compton's services!

Thanks to a generous grant from the **Yvonne and Angelo Sangiacomo Family**, the first \$10,000 in gifts to Morrissey-Compton were matched 1:1. Throughout the day, we won several prizes and matching gifts, including a \$5,000 prize for raising the most money during the 7am hour. Most amazing of all, however, Morrissey-Compton raised the most dollars out of all participating nonprofits in our category—a distinction that secured for us a special grant in the amount of **\$40,000!**

We are overwhelmed by the outpouring of support that led to this incredible win. All told, we raised close to **\$135,000** in the space of 24 hours to help

empower individuals with learning differences to succeed.

From the bottom of our hearts, and particularly on behalf of those who would not be able to access our services without financial aid, thank you for giving to Morrissey-Compton.

Expressions

Building a Village of Support and Guidance

by Angela D., Parent

I work full-time and am a single mother to a 7-year-old boy named Benjamin. Ben has had difficulties with his reading and writing skills, as well as comprehension and language. He has a very hard time sitting still in class, and therefore is easily distracted. He also has trouble understanding instructions and being able to talk to other people at his grade level. He hadn't been diagnosed with a disability, but was accepted into special education because of his very low test scores. I remember how fast my heart would beat whenever his school's number came up on my screen. "What happened today?" "What can I do to help my son?" "What is going on with him?" are questions I asked myself on a daily basis.

I heard about Morrissey-Compton through **Sue Johnson**, who had helped facilitate the "LiveAble Women" cohort that I was in at AbleWorks. I was talking to her about the stress of trying to help Ben in school and mentioned that I was worried that there might be something else going on that hinders his ability in class. She said she

would talk to someone whom had gone through a similar situation, and a few days later, emailed me with information on Morrissey-Compton.

I called in and started talking to the intake specialist. When I was quoted the rates for an assessment, I felt my shoulders instantly drop; there was no possibility of me being able to afford those prices without taking out a loan. Then she mentioned that financial aid was available, and I breathed a sigh of relief.

Ben's assessments concluded within three months after being approved for a very generous scholarship. Morrissey-Compton also did a school visit and spoke with me every step of the way. Ben was diagnosed with ADHD, Combined Presentation.

Since then, Ben has made huge leaps in his academics. With the

services offered at his school and the information that I'm starting to understand about

his diagnosis, I now know how to confidently guide him to help himself become a better student. We just had his IEP meeting to update and adjust his services. Morrissey-Compton has also explained the medication

component with facts so that I feel well informed in making decisions on my child's behalf without feeling guilty or weighed down in judgment.

Getting help from Morrissey-Compton has helped me become a better parent. Raising a boy to become a self-reliant man one day is tough on two parents, and even harder for one. I have always leaned on my family and friends for support and refer to them often as my village. Morrissey Compton is a part of this ever growing village.



Share Your Story

Please tell us how Morrissey-Compton has made a difference in your life. Call (408) 396-8953 or email [lyn.balistreri@morrcomp.org](mailto:balistreri@morrcomp.org).

Update: A Mitzvah for Morrissey-Compton

In our last newsletter we introduced you to **Gabe**, a young man who just completed his seventh grade year and Bar Mitzvah study. As his year-long philanthropy project at school, Gabe decided he wanted to focus on raising awareness of learning disabilities and resources for Morrissey-Compton.



In May, participating students presented information on 35 nonprofits and voted on which one would receive the most money. They chose Morrissey-Compton, and presented **Dr. John Brentar** with a check for **\$1,461** to help students get the help they need to do better in school. We would like to thank Gabe (shown at left) for his wonderful efforts on our behalf—he did a truly amazing job!



Dr. Ted Alper is a licensed clinical psychologist. Since 1972, he has engaged in the practice of clinical vocational assessments with clients in a variety of settings including California State Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. He has also done assessments related to Workers' Compensation, personal injury litigation, and Social Security Disability compensation.



Navigating the Transition to the Working World

by Ted Alper, Ph.D.

According to a report published by the Department of Education in 1993, more than half of the U.S. population in 1940 did not attend school beyond eighth grade, and only 6% of males and 4% of females completed four years of college. The common trajectory was to obtain full-time employment during your teen years, followed quickly by marriage and parenthood. After World War II, the more common path was to earn a college degree, obtain a job, and move out of the family home by the age of 22.

Since that time, college students are spending more time in college and living at home. In 1960, approximately 30% of young adults (ages 19-24) were still living at home; in 1980, the percentage increased to 47%. Earlier this year, **Jeffrey Selingo** reported in the *New York Times* that a major factor in this increase was the loss of manufacturing jobs, once the foundation of our economy, and transitioning to a more high-tech business world that requires more specialized education and a greater demand for advanced degrees. Selingo noted that a report published by the National Center for Education Statistics at Georgetown University found that in the 1980s, college graduates had achieved "financial independence" by the time they were 26 years old; in 2014, the average age was 30.



The Modern Career Trajectory

It is safe to say that most youth will face a very complex career path. In the 1960s, we used to think people would change their careers two or three times, and it was not unusual to work for one employer during your entire professional career. Today, individuals are likely to have even more career paths. In 2015, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that people born between 1957 and 1964 held an average of 11.7 jobs between the ages of 18 and 48 years. Based on this data, college graduates in today's world will need to work **and** prepare for their future jobs simultaneously.

The path to a career can start at an early age, and takes on greater importance in high school and as students prepare for college. In 2000, a psychologist at the University of Missouri, **Jeffrey Arnett**, coined the term "**emerging adulthood**" as a distinct stage, different from adolescence and young adulthood.

From Sprinters to Stragglers

In an interview with Selingo, Dr. Arnett stated that earning a college degree is not the only factor that predicts success; how students navigate their college years is also important. Selingo argues that students can be divided into three groups based on how they approach their college years:

"**Sprinters**" are students who have known their major since entering college, earn impressive internships every summer, and have little or no debt when they graduate. They are more likely to job hop because of their affinity to work at startups or new, cutting-edge tech companies.

"**Wanderers**" are students who have a strong and impressive academic record, but are on an uncertain path. They have likely applied for a number of jobs in a variety of fields without success, or are underemployed. At times, these students decide to attend graduate school to help them determine what they should do. Selingo argues that these students would have benefited from a gap year to explore interests and career options before enrolling in college. He added that the longer these students wander, the harder it is to catch up.

"**Stragglers**" tend to drift in and out of school during their 20s, perhaps reaching their 30s without a degree and a clear plan for the future. For them, a college education does not create many job opportunities.

There is no clear predictor for where a student will eventually fall in this classification system, but it's likely a combination of personality/emotional factors, temperament, environmental factors, and availability of opportunities.

Introducing Vocational Assessment at Morrissey-Compton!

With such challenges on the horizon and the pressure placed on students to develop a clearer career path because of the high cost of a college education, engaging in a clinical vocational assessment is a good way to increase students' chances for success. To meet this growing demand, Morrissey-Compton Educational Center is pleased to announce our **Vocational Assessment Program**, being coordinated by **Dr. Ted Alper**.

Understanding Vocational Assessment

The goal of a clinical vocational assessment is to help adults develop a pragmatic career/vocational plan that takes into account the individual's cognitive profile, areas of strengths and weaknesses, and areas of interests. The typical evaluation includes an interview, standardized tests of skills, and completion of surveys and rating scales. These evaluations are tailored based on presenting concerns, age, past and anticipated future educational plans, and previous job-related experiences.

Upon completion of the evaluation, the final summary will detail the best matches for an individual. The results will not furnish a prescription, but will provide extensive information to be used by individuals and their counselors in the vocational/educational decision-making process. We will also make referrals to local professionals (e.g., career counselors) who can offer appropriate follow-up services.

Morrissey-Compton's Added Value

Individuals who have learning or social-emotional challenges may not be satisfactorily evaluated using the standard vocational assessment tools without significant modifications. At Morrissey-Compton Educational Center, we are familiar with the functional limitations or difficulties associated with these challenges and can help tailor the assessments accordingly.

Parent Education

Upcoming Classes

The new slate of classes will be available for viewing at www.morrissey-compton.org/parent_classes.php in **August**. Pre-registration is required for all classes.

You may also sign up for the latest news and updates by visiting our home page or sending your email address to info@morrcomp.org.

Staff Experts

Bring a Speaker to Your School, Parent Group, or Other Organization

For information regarding parent education or staff presentations, contact Sue Garber, M.A. at (650) 322-5910 or sue.garber@morrcomp.org.

Morrissey-Compton's staff experts are qualified to speak on many subjects related to education and learning differences. We offer a variety of topics for you to choose from, or you can request topics customized to fit your needs.

When is the Right Time to Seek an Assessment?

Part 2: Later Elementary through High School

by Karen Dearing, Ph.D.*

Many parents struggle with the question of when to invest the time, energy, and finances to seek an assessment for their child. This two-part series presents a variety of “red flags” that parents can look out for that may help them in their decision. Part one, focusing on preschool- through early elementary school-aged children, was published in our spring newsletter; now, part two will discuss students in later elementary through high school.

To recap, **psychoeducational evaluations assess a student’s cognitive and academic strengths and weaknesses as they relate to traditional academic learning.**

Cognitive testing typically covers intellectual reasoning skills and processing skills such as memory, attention, and auditory and visual processing as relevant. **Academic testing** targets progress in reading, writing, and math as well as specific processing skills relevant to particular areas of learning (e.g., phonological awareness for reading). When a need is indicated, psychoeducational evaluations can also assess for the significance of social, emotional, and/or behavioral challenges, as difficulties in these areas can certainly affect learning. Psychoeducational evaluations can identify specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia, processing disorders including executive function (EF) deficits, and disorders related to social, emotional, attentional, and behavioral development such as ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and mood and anxiety disorders.

General Indicators

Regardless of the specific challenge, the more severe

learning disorders and mental health conditions that affect learning are often “caught” by school personnel and/or by parents by the middle of elementary school. However, more subtle learning challenges can make achieving up to one’s true potential challenging well beyond early elementary years.

As students transition into later elementary, middle school, and beyond, one of the most consistent triggers for an evaluation is when a student is experiencing significant frustration with, stress related to, or diminished confidence in school, despite working hard.



Also, students who sometimes appear to be “lazy” with respect to school are, more often than not, experiencing genuine learning differences or disabilities; their avoidance of schoolwork may serve as a means to cope with stress or frustration. In other instances, students may lack the coping

strategies to effectively engage in school.

Ultimately, parents should be encouraged to “trust their gut” when it comes to their child’s learning challenges. Parents sometimes report that they have been told by teachers that an assessment isn’t necessary because their child is “on grade level” or “doing fine.” Learning is about more than just grades and benchmarks. The process and sheer effort that go into learning are also relevant, particularly as students advance in school.

A Critical Shift in Learning

In third grade and beyond, the focus of academic learning shifts from building a basic academic skill set (word reading, basic math functions and facts, and mechanics of written expression such as spelling and handwriting) to applied academic work, meaning reading comprehension, written expression, and math and number reasoning. If small holes in a student’s academic foundation have formed in early elementary school, the impact of these is often seen as difficulty when the applied demands of academic learning increase in later elementary school.

Specific Signs of Learning Disabilities

Signs of specific learning disabilities in reading, writing, and math for students in later elementary school and beyond are numerous. When a student is working hard and having any of the challenges noted below, and particularly if they are feeling the impact of those challenges in terms of their emotional reaction or self-esteem, an evaluation may well be warranted.

Signs of a dyslexic profile:

- Being a slow reader.
- Being a reluctant reader.
- Making word substitutions, reading errors, or other dysfluencies when reading aloud.
- Lingering letter or number reversals when writing.
- Spelling difficulties.
- Poor mastery of math facts.
- More difficulty with word problems in math than with calculations.

Signs of a writing disorder:

- Written output doesn’t match the sophistication of a student’s orally presented ideas.
- The process of writing seems to limit what is expressed.
- Poor mechanics in writing (applied spelling, inconsistent use of capitalization, punctuation).
- Handwriting characterized by uneven spacing, poor letter formation, and/or words that float above the line.

Note: As students’ writing skills develop through third, fourth, and fifth grades, most are able to improve the coherence and organization with which they are able to communicate their ideas. Difficulty doing so, despite quality instruction and effort, can be a **sign of a writing disorder or an attentional or EF weakness.**

Signs of a math disability:

- Struggles to understand concepts such as division, fractions, decimals, and percentages.
- Difficulty mastering math facts.
- Challenges with word problems.

Note: A tendency to commit small (unforced, “careless”) errors in math such as transposing numbers, placing decimals in the wrong place, and making calculation errors due to alignment can be **signs of a math disability or potential writing disorder, visual processing weakness, or attentional issue.**

ADHD, ASD, & Emotional Disorders

As was the case in early elementary school, beyond specific academic concerns, the behavioral, social, and emotional challenges associated with ADHD, ASD, and emotional disorders can absolutely have an adverse impact on learning. As academic demands increase, behaviors associated with



ADHD that weren’t seen as problematic or interfering can lead to clearer functional impairment at this age. Many young children are highly active and cannot sustain focus and regulate behavior the way older children or adults can. However, by about third grade, the neurocognitive mechanisms for regulation are in place and the social expectations of classroom behavior are well understood

by most children. Behaviorally, most children will no longer show consistent restless (leaning across desk, shifting in chairs, fiddling with objects) or impulsive (calling out, chatting with friends when the teacher is requiring attention) behavior that is more normative in the earlier years. Similarly, as academic material increases in complexity and quantity, most children will not have to exert notable effort to regulate and sustain attention. **Children who seem to struggle to meet the increasing behavioral and attentional regulatory demands of school may indeed be suffering from an attention deficit disorder. If similar challenges are observed in the home or extracurricular environments, this is particularly telling.**

As academic demands increase and students transition from building basic academic skills to applied learning, generalization and inference tend to be specific areas of challenge for students on the autism spectrum. Individuals with ASD are often seen as very literal or “black-and-white” thinkers. Challenges with efficient retrieval of information and/or broad challenges with processing speed are

continued on page 12

*For information about Dr. Karen Dearing, see our spring newsletter or visit morrisey-compton.org.

If your child of any age is having school-related difficulties, contact Morrissey-Compton for an assessment at (650) 322-5910.

When to Seek an Assessment: Part 2

continued from page 11

also common. These qualities alone do not necessarily indicate the presence of ASD, but these, in combination with difficulty engaging with peers, reading social cues and signals, and “reading between the lines” in social interactions can certainly be indicators of a mild autism spectrum disorder that might not have been identified previously.



for their learning differences by relying on intellectual strengths and memory will find that they can no longer bypass their difficulties in the face of increasing academic demands. Additionally, students prone to stress, worry, self-doubt, depression, or low frustration tolerance may find the academic demands of high school to be more than they can handle, and thus emotional adjustment becomes an increasingly important factor to consider.

EF Weaknesses

As children enter middle school, all of the above markers continue to be relevant when considering whether an evaluation is warranted. Additionally, middle school places increasing demands on students’ executive function (EF) skills—time and task management, organization, planning, prioritizing, etc.—as they have to juggle multiple classes/teachers. These increasing demands can expose significant challenges with EF, which can stem from an attention deficit disorder or other social or emotional issues or can occur as an isolated area of weakness. EF weakness often manifests as chronic procrastination, losing track of assignments and/or materials, failing to turn in assignments on time, poor time management and planning larger projects, and frequently feeling “caught off guard” by the expectations of teachers. Academically, EF weakness may be the culprit when challenges with applied academics (reading comprehension, written expression, math problem solving) are present but the basic skills (word reading, spelling and writing mechanics, math facts mastery and basic calculations) seem otherwise intact. For example, EF weakness is often at play when a student struggles to organize ideas in writing.

Considerations for High School Students

In high school and beyond, once again, all previously discussed signs of potential learning differences or disabilities continue to be relevant. Moreover, as the rigor of academic work increases, subtle challenges with learning that have not previously been identified as “issues” can become just that. Sometimes, especially bright students who have previously compensated

Accommodations: Timing is Everything Finally, the timing of standardized testing with respect to college entrance is a relevant consideration for determining when to schedule an assessment. At present, assessment documentation can be up to three years old for the Independent School Entrance Exam (ISEE) and the ACT, up to five years old for the SAT, and must be within the current or last academic year for the Secondary School Admissions Test (SSAT).

While the identification of a learning disability or other processing, developmental, or other mental health condition will lead to a call for academic accommodations, each standardized testing agency has its own review process. A request for accommodations on standardized tests does not guarantee that they will be granted. Many factors, including a documented history of disability and of accommodation in the school setting, are almost always necessary prerequisites. Individuals interested in learning more should review the excellent documentation provided on each testing board’s website.

While there are no hard and fast rules about documentation for **accommodations at the college level**, the one thing to keep in mind is that many colleges now want to see a particular test included in an assessment that can only be given after a student turns 16. As such, when the timing is not critical for assessment or reassessment, waiting until after the 16th birthday can eliminate the possibility of needing to complete additional testing when entering college.

Does Brain Training Help Students with ADHD and Learning Challenges?

by John Brentar, Ph.D.

In our technology-focused world, particularly in Silicon Valley, we have learned to expect that computers will solve many of our problems and improve our efficiency. However, most of us have experienced that the ease of technology is not always a satisfactory solution.

In the field of psychology, brain training programs have become increasingly popular and advertise themselves as an efficient way to treat ADHD, working memory, or general memory improvement. Some of these companies, such as **Cogmed**, cater to psychologists, families, and schools as a way to help students with ADHD or learning challenges. Others, such as **Lumosity**, focus their marketing efforts on the general population, particularly older adults, as a way to improve memory. Collectively, these brain training products are designed to promote neuroplasticity, or the ability of the brain to change over a lifespan.

A Lucrative Business

The brain training market has grown to \$1 billion (Cogmed’s sales have grown to close to \$15 million), and according to **SharpBrains**, a San Francisco research house, forecasts predict growth to \$6 billion by 2020. Parents of school-age children with learning and attention challenges are asked to make a significant financial commitment, and students a significant time commitment, in order to participate in the Cogmed program. With such an investment, an important question becomes, “Does brain training work?” Because many of our parents are more likely to ask about the Cogmed program, I will focus on examining its effectiveness.

Depending on Who You Ask...

Cogmed is designed to improve working memory, a trait regarded by psychologists and educators as essential for academic success. **Pearson**, who owns the Cogmed program, list a number of studies on their website purporting success in improving working memory. In one 2012 study, researchers at Pearson performed their own analysis that showed average gains

of 26% in visual-spatial working memory and 23% in verbal working memory.

In an article published in *Psychiatric Times* in 2014, **Dr. Larry Brooks** reported that while independent studies evaluating Cogmed’s effectiveness generally show that subjects’ performance improved at brain games with repetition and practice, it is not clear whether this improvement translates into real-world benefits. Specifically, Dr. Brooks argued that improvements in working memory span is only one small piece of working memory, and that improvement in this area alone is not sufficient to improve overall cognition in students with other deficits in learning, memory, and executive function skills. He added that critics have also argued that many of the studies are plagued by small sample sizes and non-replicated results.

Additional Research & Conclusions

Since 2012, at least three studies or multi-study overviews published in peer-reviewed journals have concluded that Cogmed is ineffective for ADHD. A fourth review included Cogmed with other brain training programs and found the group ineffective. In one of these studies, **Dr. Anil Chacko** and his associates (2014) studied 85 children aged 7 to 11 diagnosed with ADHD. These children were randomly assigned to either standard Cogmed Working Memory Training or a well-controlled Cogmed Working Memory Training placebo condition and evaluated both before and three weeks after treatment. Outcome measures included parent and teacher ratings of ADHD symptoms; objective measures of attention, activity level, and impulsivity; and psychometric indices of working memory and academic achievement.

Dr. Chacko concluded that “when a more rigorous comparison condition is utilized, Cogmed Working Memory Training demonstrates



continued on page 14

Meet Morrissey-Compton's New Staff Members

Sarah Hoxie, L.C.S.W. has worked with children, teens, adults and families in a variety of settings. Sarah believes that all individuals and families have an innate drive towards health and happiness. Her job as a therapist is to help guide people on their journey by providing a safe and supportive place to explore their thoughts and feelings, learn new skills or strategies, and help them make sense of their experiences.



As a graduate of the Smith College School for Social Work in 2003, Sarah understands people as a combination of their internal experiences, history, environment, behaviors, and current situation. She has helped people struggling with relationships, depression, anxiety, anger, abuse, feeling different from others, and disabilities, as well as other challenges. Sarah is at Morrissey-Compton one day a week and works at a nearby psychiatric hospital four days a week. In her free time, she enjoys reading and doing arts and crafts.

Educational Specialist **Robert Urowsky, M.A.** comes to Morrissey-Compton from Edgewood Community School in San Francisco, where he was the principal. He brings a wealth of knowledge and experience related to developing and maintaining positive behavioral support plans and navigating the IEP maze.



Robert offers educational therapy with a focus on Slingerland (e.g., phonemic awareness, decoding, orthography, reading fluency, reading comprehension, handwriting, spelling, and written expression). His main focus will be in this area; however, he is familiar with other programs such as Step Up To Writing®, Making Math Real™, and Social Thinking®. His approach is strength-based and student-centered, and he is open to seeing students grades 3 to 12.

Brain Training

continued from page 13

effects on certain aspects of working memory in children with ADHD; however, it does not appear to foster treatment generalization to other domains of functioning. As such, Cogmed Working Memory Training should not be considered a viable treatment for children with ADHD." In other words, Cogmed did not make significant changes in "true" working memory as used in school, and the study participants showed no improvements in academic functioning (e.g., in reading, math, or spelling). He noted, "Our data suggest that Cogmed really only improves the more basic, and arguably less important, short-term memory on tasks that closely resemble Cogmed training tasks."

The Bottom Line

In the research world, a skeptical stance is vital in science because it promotes further investigation. Without further evidence, the Cogmed program does not appear to be worth the investment at this point of time. Perhaps in the future, it will have a role in a multiple treatment approach program, including educational therapy, medication, brain training, and school-based interventions. In the meantime, educational therapy focused on working memory strategies in the context of the student's academic work may be a more productive and wiser investment. For a list of working memory strategies, please visit www.morrissey-compton.org.

Summer and Fall 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. Summer groups are still forming, and fall groups are being planned. We're offering the following groups:

Social Skills: Making and Keeping Friends

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.

Stop, Relax, and Think: Managing Impulses

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

This group will help children identify their fears and understand how to manage anxiety. Children will learn to recognize the situations that trigger their worried feelings, and will practice strategies to help decrease their anxiety.

Girl Drama!

Middle School Girls: Mondays, 6 to 8pm (with pizza!) *Note: This group meets in Palo Alto*

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.

Our Groups Make a Difference!

We pay special attention to generalizing learning to both home and school. Group content is specifically designed for the needs and goals of the participants. For more info or to register your child, email Sue Garber, M.A. at sue.garber@morrcomp.org. Please include:

1. Your name and contact information.
2. Your child's name, DOB, age, and grade that he/she is entering.
3. Any times (Monday through Saturday between 3 and 7pm) that your child is **not** available to attend a group.
4. Whether you are interested in the summer or fall session.
5. A brief summary of your concerns about your child.
6. The group that you are interested in potentially joining.

Slingerland® Workshops

If your child has been struggling with reading, spelling, speaking, 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 summer, Morrissey-Compton will be holding two workshops in our Redwood City office for incoming 2nd to 6th graders with little to no prior Slingerland experience. This intensive course will cover:



- Decoding skills
- Reading fluency
- Comprehension
- Basic spelling rules and generalizations
- Introduction or review of cursive handwriting

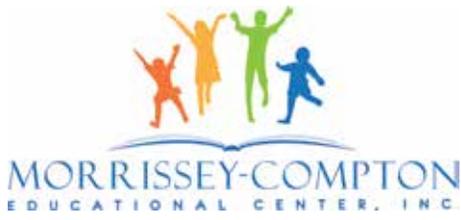
Tuesdays and Thursdays, July 12 to August 18

2 to 3:30pm: Incoming grades 2 to 4

4 to 5:30pm: Incoming grades 4 to 6

Cost: \$1,370 includes: intake appointment, 18 hours of instruction, and parent conference.

Given the amount of interest this summer, we are also planning to offer a Slingerland workshop in the fall (dates TBD). For information or to sign up for either summer or fall workshops, please contact Adria Flores at adria.flores@morrcomp.org or (650) 322-5910.



595 Price Avenue, Redwood City, CA 94063
Phone (650) 322-5910 • Fax (650) 322-7075

Staff

Executive Director

John T. Brentar, Ph.D.

Director of Educational Services

Erin Shinn Berg, M.Ed.

Senior Educational Specialists

Brooke Cargile, M.A.

Ashley Kinkaid Koedel, M.A.

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.

Denali St. Amand, Ph.D.

C. Priya Tjerandsen, M.A.

Robert Urowsky, M.A.

Psychologists

Ted Alper, Ph.D.

Ginger Brudos, Ph.D.

Janet Dafoe, Ph.D.

Karen Dearing, Ph.D.

Cassandra Golding, Ph.D.

Will Martinez, Ph.D.

Erica Ragan, Ph.D.

Heather Taylor, Ph.D.

Director of Research

Surina Basho, Ph.D.

Group & Parent Education Coordinator

Sue Garber, M.A.

Postdoctoral Fellows

Lorretta Abbott, Psy.D.

Laura Chyou, Ph.D.

MFT Intern

Lety Arreola-Garcia, M.A.

Therapist

Sarah Hoxie, L.C.S.W.

Tutors

Bill Nielsen

Emily Reich, M.A.

Director of Fund Development

Lyn Balistreri

Intake Coordinator

Suzy Music

Support & Office Staff

Paulette Giovannoni

Kathy Kinkaid

Fiona McVicar

President

Jeff Wiley

Vice President

Allan Epstein

Treasurer

Jack Morton

Founders

Carolyn Compton, Ph.D.

Patricia J. Morrissey, Ed.D.

Directors at Large

Dan Brown

Julie Cavanna-Jerbic

Michael Masia

Jeanne B. Ware

Board of Directors

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.

