

## **SRDS Parents Guild Meeting**

**Thursday, September 4, 2025**

### **I. Welcome & Approval of May 2025 Minutes**

The first SRDS Parents Guild meeting of the 2025-2026 school year began with the approval of the May 2025 meeting minutes. Heather Holder and Alana Murphy welcomed attendees and thanked volunteers.

The new Executive Board Members were introduced: Allison Berkowitz (Vice President), Lina Starr (Treasurer), and Taraneh Hazhin (Secretary).

Past Presidents Jacqueline Vasquez, Rosanna Young, and Sarah Powell were honored.

Class Parents and Committee Chairs were introduced, asked to stand and were applauded for their efforts over the summer.

Volunteer opportunities were highlighted through a QR link:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1MjxLBia2wjUPXqDisCUhBYTAtb3bUHN7kVAbjgLriOo/edit>

Chrissie Signore, the PG advisor, was thanked for her behind-the-scenes work.

### **II. President of the Board of Trustees Welcome and Vision for Saddle River Day School**

- Mr. Wes Powell, President of the Board of Trustees, welcomed everyone and shared his vision for the school.
- He emphasized the importance of community support and the school's growth.
- Discussion on the school's history.
- Mention of the new high school building, continuous new opportunities and the need for financial contributions to support it.

### **III. Head of School's Welcome and Updates on School Growth**

- Mr. Jalaj Desai welcomed everyone and discussed the school's growth, including the largest ninth grade class in SRDS history. Emphasized school's need to continue to grow in order to continue offering so many options. SRDS will continue to focus on learning and inspiring our students to succeed by remaining neutral and not taking political sides or focussing on polarizing issues.
- New traffic patterns and parking updates were mentioned to ensure campus safety. Spots in the middle of the front field are reserved and will require key access.
- Construction updates on the Hall of Science and Entrepreneurship were shared.

- Introduction of a new AI platform, [SRDS.AI](#), built by SRDS to personalize education and make support available 24/7 but will never replace a teacher, rather extend learning. Encouraged parents to speak with their children about AI and encouraged them to have open communication about the pros and cons.

#### **IV. SRDS Enrichment Programs**

- Ms. Erica Cohen, Director of Enrichment Programs & US Learning Specialist, introduced herself and outlined her role in running various enrichment programs all beginning 9/8.
- Coaching Academy, after-school sports clubs, Music Institute, and Spring Break Academy are mentioned.
- One-on-one tutoring services are available, and parents are encouraged to contact her.
- Upcoming events and opportunities for childcare during breaks were highlighted.

#### **V. Student Wellness and Resources**

- Ms. Alicia Pooley, School Counselor, introduced herself and explained her role in supporting students' mental and emotional well-being.
- She emphasized the importance of addressing students' anxieties and stress.
- Fidget toys are available in her office for students to help them manage anxiety.
- Parents are encouraged to reach out with any concerns or issues affecting their children.

#### **VI. SRDS Technology Update**

- Ms. Laura Hollis, Director of Technology, introduced herself and thanked the technology team for their hard work over the summer.
- Installations of new BenQ Boards with extensive touch capabilities were installed and the Graphics and IDEAs Lab were refreshed.
- Introduction of new VR headsets and a class that will be half in-person and half in VR.
- Updates on parent workshops and the Video Production LA Trip in October 2025 were shared.

#### **VII. Middle School News and Upcoming Events**

- Ms. Stasia Kelly, Head of Middle School, welcomed everyone and discussed the new schedule and its impact on students. Emphasized longer classes allow more student/teacher interaction, students will have the same amount of homework, time management skills, study skills.
- New electives and increased time for arts and music classes were highlighted.

- The importance of reading emails and the happenings document was emphasized.
- Orientation trips for MS students were mentioned with details on 6th, 7th, and 8th grades' overnight and 5th grade's day trips. She noted the social importance of these trips as there are more than 30 new MS students this year.

### **VIII. Mr. Cesar Rodriguez's Introduction as Middle School Dean of Student Life**

- Mr. Cesar Rodriguez, Middle School Dean of Student Life, introduced himself and shared his teaching experience.
- He mentioned his role in working on the advisory program, running advisory lessons, and coaching middle school volleyball.
- Emphasis on the importance of social activities and the advisory program.
- Mentioned organizing events like "Breath of Voice" and piloting a new leadership program for students to develop leadership skills.
- Parents are encouraged to reach out with any questions or concerns.

### **IX. Middle School Dean's Welcome and Updates**

- Ms. Amanda Bieglecki, Middle School Dean of Students, introduced herself and encouraged parents to reach out with any concerns about middle school students and emphasized on her commitment to student safety and happiness.

### **X. Lower School News and Upcoming Events**

- Ms. Dana Stern, Head of Lower School, introduced herself and thanked the Parents Guild for their partnership and treats on the first day of school.
- She shared positive feedback about the smooth transitions for younger students and the importance of following drop-off and pick-up procedures including arriving by 8 AM for the Lower School day to promptly start at 8:05am.
- Announced upcoming events: Lower School New Parent Reception on September 10th and Back-to-School Night on September 18th, with two sessions for parents who have children in different grade levels.
- Mentioned the LS coffees in October and the new LS photo gallery.
- Introduced Ms. Dana Smith, the Lower School Learning Support and Instructional Teacher and her role in Lower School and the importance of co-teaching and visiting classrooms.

## **XI. Community Engagement at SRDS**

- Presented by Ms. Dana Stern, Head of Lower School.
- She introduced Ms. Chris Lebovits, Director of Community Engagement and Assistant Director of LS Admissions, mentioning that she wanted to thank all the new family mentors who have been reaching out to the new families and making connections.
- Ms. Lebovits will plan different opportunities for families, parents, and guardians to get together throughout the school year.
- Crafty Rebels - Paint and Pet Workshop was very popular last year and is being hosted again October 22nd at 6:30-8pm.
- First Book Club meeting will be on Thursday, October 29th at 7pm. Reading "Wild Dark Shore" by Charlotte McConaughey.

## **XII. Upper School News and Upcoming Events**

- Dr. Shai Zacaraev, Head of Upper School, introduced himself and talked about the high school experience and the goal of making students independent by graduation while supporting them to mature and take calculated risk. He highlights the importance of listening to students and letting them solve their own problems.
- Discussed upcoming events: Orientation Day, Buddy Barbecue, Orientation overnight trips for 9th and 10th grade as an important way to bond. Juniors will be visiting Marist College this year so they understand how to prepare and what to expect on a college tour, followed by a trip to Gravity Vault and a BBQ by Chef Mark. Seniors will spend a full day on the college application process and the annual Boat Trip.
- Mentioned senior privileges, junior privileges, and the importance of students following the dress code. Course add/drop ongoing the first two weeks of school.
- Encouraged everyone to watch "Only at The Day," SRDS news program that is directed and produced by High School students every month.
- Upper School Club Fair will be on September 18th in the courtyard, run similarly to a college fair.
- Mentioned Upper School Back to School Night and the parent coffees as well as Driver Ed for 10th graders on campus with the opportunity to take the written test at school. A registration link will follow in the US Happenings Doc.

## **XII. Admissions Update**

- Mr. Geoffrey Bowman, Director of Admissions, welcomed new and returning families and thanked them for choosing Saddle River Day School.
- He mentioned the successful admission year and the importance of accepting students and families that fit SRDS culture.

- Announced the New Family Survey will be going out soon to gather feedback and improve the onboarding process. Encouraged families to participate with honest feedback.
- He highlighted upcoming Admissions events for LS, MS and US: Open Houses, Information Sessions, and the arrival of two new exchange students from Spain.

### **XIII. Athletics Update and Fall Sports**

- Mr. PJ Petrow, Athletic Director, provided an update on athletics and the construction of six new tennis courts in the future. The gym floor was recently redone with the new SRDS logo and the space can be divided in half for basketball and volleyball now.
- He mentioned the start of fall sports practices and the importance of registering early for winter sports to give enough time for planning and organizing practices and games. SRDS has a freshman Volleyball team this year for the first time.
- Discussed the new app, Groupspot, for better communication and attendance tracking. Will be released in the near future.
- Talked about the onboarding of sports recruits and the importance of students meeting with college counselors as soon as possible to determine what needs to be done for college applications.
- SRDS Rebels are partnering with the New York Red Bulls soccer team for a game and stadium experience on October 4th to help raise funds to support the Rebel Athletic Club.
- Thursday, November 20th, first fall sports banquet will be held to bring Middle School and Upper School sports together for a culminating event at the end of the season. We're going to start to do that seasonally with the fall, winter, and spring sports.
- Mentioned the importance of having students advocate for themselves, by encouraging them and guiding them through the process, to teach responsibility and help build great characters.

### **XIV. Closing Remarks and Future Meetings**

- Parents Guild Co-Presidents thanked everyone for attending and mentioned the next meeting is on October 9th at 8:30am in the PAC.
- Provided information about the "One Ask One Click" program for raising money for Ladies' Night Out and Gala baskets.
- Encouraged parents to reach out for any support and to attend upcoming parent coffees.
- Closed the meeting with Motion to Adjourn.