

SRDS Parents Guild Meeting

Thursday, March 5, 2026

I. Welcome & Approval of February 2026 Minutes

- Heather Holder and Alana Murphy, Co-Presidents of the Parents Guild, welcomed attendees and started this month's Parents Guild Meeting with the approval of the February 2026 Meeting minutes.

II. Lower School News and Upcoming Events

- Ms. Dana Stern, Head of Lower School, welcomed parents and mentioned upcoming Lower School parent-teacher conferences, urging parents to coordinate times with teachers.
- Grades 1-4 have completed their first round of Zoom calls with the Malawi Children's Mission Academy, fostering global citizenship.
- Various activities are being held to celebrate Reading Across America, including mystery readers, bookmark-making, pajamas and read, and dressing up as favorite book characters.
- Grades 1-4 will visit the Superdome for an off-site field day experience, while pre-K3 through kindergarten will have a similar event on campus.
- Announced the Jump Rope for Heart event for grades 1-4, which will start after the break.
- Auditions for the play "Frozen" will be held on March 11 for students in grades 1-4.

III. Community Engagement at SRDS

- Presented by Ms. Dana Stern, Head of Lower School, on behalf of Ms. Chris Lebovits, Director of Community Engagement and Assistant Director of LS Admissions.
- A yoga and mindfulness session for families in the Lower School is scheduled for March 12 with Danielle Larson.
- Rebel Readers will meet on March 19, and the April Book Club meeting will be on April 16.
- Code A La Mode is scheduled for March 18, with registration details to be shared soon.

IV. AI Forum Opportunities

- Mr. Kevin Merges, Chief Global Impact Officer, introduced a panel discussion on AI, featuring upper school students.
- An US Junior discussed her work on Vanta AI, an educational app that teaches AI basics and data structures. Another US Junior talked about Writing Mastery, a software program that integrates AI into the grading system to provide individualized writing instruction. Two of the Upper School sophomores described their project to create an AI platform for schools in Africa using Raspberry Pi devices.
- A panel event on April 9 will discuss how AI is used in various aspects of school and life, open to all parents and students.

V. College Admissions News and Updates

- Mrs. Karen Ferretti, Director of College Counseling, discussed changes in the college application process and trends over the last few years.
- The class of 2026 is mid-cycle, with data points expected in the next three weeks.
- She explained early decision and early action strategies with examples of successful applications.
- Trends in college admissions include more applications, increased selectivity, and the impact of test-optional policies.
- The Supreme Court's decision on affirmative action resulting in the rise of the number of rural student applications.
- Explained the importance of demonstrated interest and engagement with colleges, especially those close to our location and home.
- Discussed the trend towards big public schools in the South and small liberal arts colleges in the North.
- Mentioned the impact of social media and the "Alabama Rush" on college choices.
- Explained that the college-bound population in the United States is expected to remain flat, with international students playing a significant role.
- Emphasizes on the importance of AI in college admissions and future readiness.

VI. Middle School News and Upcoming Events

- Presented by Ms. Amanda Bieglecki, Middle School Dean of Students, on behalf of Ms. Anastasia Kelly, Head of Middle School.
- Discussed the upcoming Middle School conferences, emphasizing the importance of student-led conferences and academic planning for the 2026-2027 school year.
- Highlighted the Advisory Cup Competition with Mr. Burnett's eighth grade advisory and Mr. Sanchez's fifth grade advisory currently leading.
- Various Middle School teams and students are participating in competitions, including the National STEM Honor Society, Math Olympiad, and Odyssey of the Mind.
- Congratulations! A fourth grader will represent Saddle River Day School at the regional Spelling Bee.
- There will be new spring NBlock choices for Middle School students.
- Upcoming events in April include 7th grade field trip to Boston, NSTEM field trip, and the final CIE bootcamp of the year.

VII. Upper School News and Upcoming Events

- Dr. Shai Zacaraev, Head of Upper School, emphasized the importance of attending Zoom meetings for scheduling discussions
- Presentations on scheduling and academic planning are being shared with students and parents, including information on honors and AP classes.

- The upper school will have multiple advising opportunities for students to plan their next year, including assemblies and one-on-one meetings with advisors.
- Upcoming events include the DECA Trip, Wall Street Trip, and the Robotics Team competing during Spring Break.
- April is packed with activities, including SRDS GALA “Limitless”, US prom, Innovation Night, and a Science presentation.
- Thanked everyone for their participation in Career Day, highlighting the efforts of Chris Lebovits, Robert Kettlewell, and others in organizing the event. There was a lot of positive feedback about students traveling to the places of business this year.

VIII. Office of Development Update

- Ms. Lynn McCormack, Director of Development, provided an update on philanthropy and donation opportunities, including the SRDS Fund, Building the Future Campaign, and the Rebels Athletic Club.
- The new building project is on track to be completed by June, with a donor wall being designed for significant donors.
- Gala is a major fundraising initiative, aiming to raise money for the school while also being a community event.
- A QR code was provided to make donations easier. She emphasized the importance of philanthropy in supporting the school's programs and initiatives that go beyond tuition. Thank you to all our generous donors.

IX. Rebels Athletic Club (RAC) News and Update

- Ms. Jodi Ramasamy, President of REBELS Athletic Club, introduced the REBELS Athletic Club (RAC) and encouraged parents to get involved through GroupSpot, a platform for managing sports schedules and communication.
- RAC aims to support the athletic program from pre-K through upper school, fostering a sense of community and involvement.
- Provided highlights from recent athletic events, including the track team's success, the bowling team's progress, and the girls' basketball team's upcoming semifinal game.
- Encouraged everyone to get involved through many types of community engagement.

X. Athletics Update

- Mr. PJ Petrow, SRDS Athletic Director, mentioned the importance of REBEL Athletic Club (RAC) and encouraged everyone to get involved in the athletics program and/or volunteer.
- Shared the 8th grade experience of visiting MetLife Stadium, on Career Day, emphasizing the well-organized event and the focus on branding, marketing, sales, and finance. The event was highly engaging, with students asking questions and networking, exchanging LinkedIn and contact information. He highlighted the impact of the event on students, opening their eyes to potential career opportunities.

- Discussed the success of the track team, with two students achieving All-Conference and All-County recognition.
- The bowling team had a strong season, reaching the second round of State Finals.
- The girls' basketball team advanced to the Semifinals.
- Upcoming events include live streaming of the girls' basketball game.
- Provided details on the spring sports offerings which will start on March 9th.
- Mentioned the need for patience as sports move off-campus due to field issues, but reminded everyone this is temporary during the construction.

XI. Admissions Update

- Mr. Geoffrey Bowman, Head of Admissions, provided updates on the Admissions Process transitioning from regular decision to rolling admissions.
- The Admissions Office celebrated new families with Visit Days, New Parents Receptions, and Academic Planning Meetings.
- An Academic Life Survey will be sent out via Survey Monkey to gather feedback on students' experiences with classes, teachers, and homework. He emphasized the importance of the survey for continuous improvement and encouraged parents to also participate through their link.

XII. Technology Update

- Ms. Laura Hollis, Director of Technology, shared the Career Day experience at Barnicle Brothers, a production group.
- Announced the annual coding celebration, Code Ala Mode, organized and designed by The Girls Who Code, on March 18th. The event is for families to see what students accomplished and will feature the Robotics Team, virtual reality headsets, and Lower School teachers serving ice cream sundaes.
- The technology team is installing 40 new speakers for the PA system in the new building.
- TEDx Youth will take place on April 15th, with ten US students and two keynote speakers discussing various topics.
- One of the US students explained the creation of a documentary called "Cuddles" highlighting the process of producing "Footloose" and showed the audience his trailer.
- Another UP student explained that Ms. Hollis's biography and journalism class is working with various clients to create promotional videos for businesses. The class is also creating videos for school community projects, including a middle school sports broadcast and engineering projects.
- Videos for international clients in Haiti and Asia are being produced to promote reading culture in Zambia, Africa.

XIII. Security Update and Procedures

- Mr. Tim Gerity, Security Manager, provided an overview of security initiatives, including upgrades to the PA system and access control.
- The new building will have state-of-the-art access control and camera systems.
- Traffic patterns may shift with the opening of the new building, and the security team is working to improve pedestrian and vehicle safety.
- Emphasized the importance of following guidelines for drop-off and pick-up to ensure a safe and orderly experience.

XIV. Parent Guild Updates, Nomination Process, Save the Dates and GALA Surprises

- PG Co-Presidents announced the next PG Parent Coffee event at Panera (Tice's Corner) is Monday March 16th at 8:30am after drop-off.
- Reminded everyone about the upcoming "Cocktails and Connections" event hosted by the Head of School, Mr. Jalaj Desai, and invited parents to join the event.
- Gala is on April 17th, and encouraged parents to visit the Gala website for information and to purchase mystery box tickets.
- The meeting included a fun activity involving finding hidden raffle tickets and music to keep the participants engaged.
- The next PG Meeting will be on Thursday, April 9th, 2026 at 8:30am in Alford Hall - PAC.
- Closed the meeting with Motion to Adjourn, thanked everyone for their continued support and wished everyone a safe and happy Spring Break.