

SRDS Parents Guild Meeting

Thursday, September 10, 2026

I. Welcome & Approval of May 2026 Minutes

The first SRDS Parents Guild meeting of the 2026-2027 school year began with the approval of the May 2026 meeting minutes. Alana Murphy and Cadien Mayers, Co-Presidents of the Parents Guild, introduced themselves, welcomed attendees and thanked everyone for attending the first PG meeting of the 2026-2027 school year.

Past Presidents, Heather Holder and Rosanna Young, were honored.

II. Welcome from SRDS Head of School

- Mr. Jalaj Desai, SRDS Head of School, welcomed everyone and emphasized the school's core philosophy encapsulated in four pillars: Discover, Create, Venture, and Launch. He explained that these values underpin learning across all divisions and are intended to cultivate curiosity, creativity, courage, and real-world readiness in every student.
- He highlighted the Dr. Kristen Walsh Hall of Science and Entrepreneurship as a physical manifestation of SRDS's identity. While Walsh Hall primarily serves upper school students, the building symbolizes the aspirational pathway for Lower School and Middle School families by illustrating where the educational journey is headed.
- Academics by division were contextualized: Lower School employs project-based learning where students build, test, and iterate to learn core concepts. Middle School focuses on capital projects that teach students to take ownership of a significant idea from inception to completion. Upper School offers advanced coursework culminating in the Gateway Honors Diploma to challenge students to reach high levels of scholarship.
- On AI initiatives, he noted that every teacher will complete an AI Ready Teacher Certificate during a five-week program this fall, guided by a designated Chief AI Officer. The SRDS AI platform, serving grades 3–12, will continue to evolve within a thoughtful governance framework. Families were encouraged to review the AI Literacy Framework on the school website under Academics.
- Addressing the changing college admissions landscape, Mr. Desai underscored that AI tools now influence how applications are initially reviewed. To ensure student achievements are accurately represented, SRDS will adjust transcripts so that high school courses taken at the middle school level (e.g., chemistry or biology) are properly listed on student transcripts.
- He reiterated the importance of community partnership. Families' support for school expectations, such as dress code and school spirit, helps model pride and professionalism, particularly during the college fair visits expected on campus this fall. He reaffirmed the school's commitment to being close-knit, flexible, communicative, and personalized, while delivering true academic rigor.

- The campus underwent upgrades, including a new turf field and tennis courts. The patio project is weeks from completion. The Walsh Hall Commons is progressing and is designed as a central space for collaboration, study, and community gatherings.

III. Lower School News and Upcoming Events

- Ms. Dana Stern, Head of Lower School, welcomed everyone and reported a smooth and positive start for Lower School, including a notably calm transition for the youngest students in pre-K3 and pre-K4. She expressed appreciation for the partnership and proactive communication shown by families.
- She reminded families to ensure students arrive by 8:00am so they can begin the day with their classmates at 8:05 a.m. and participate in daily announcements at approximately 8:07–8:10 a.m. She acknowledged that occasional delays happen but stressed the value of consistent on-time arrival for students' well-being and routine.
- For dismissal, she asked that families not arrive before 2:55 p.m. for K–4 car line pickup, noting that early arrivals create traffic congestion and compromise safety. She also requested that Middle School pickup not begin before 3:15 p.m. to maintain a safe, orderly flow.
- She asked parents to copy classroom TAs on any email that changes a student's dismissal plan to ensure that messages are seen if a classroom teacher is teaching or in a meeting.
- Programs are off to a strong start: Coaching Academy and Music Institute began this week, and Aftercare continues with many of the same staff and additional Upper School helpers, which strengthens the cross-divisional community.
- Curricular health and well-being initiatives include monthly mindfulness sessions with Danielle Larson to provide students with tools for self-regulation and calm, and monthly HealthBarn sessions emphasizing nutrition and healthy habits.
- Lower School Back-to-School Night will be held next Thursday with two sessions to accommodate families with siblings; details were sent via both hard copy and email. Families are encouraged to attend Homecoming as a community-building event, and information about October Lower School coffees will follow.
- Uniform guidance will be re-sent in hard copy. She clarified expectations (e.g., polo dresses or jumpers with plain white shirts; SRDS logo allowed) and advised families not to worry if orders are delayed, as the school is aware and supportive.

IV. Middle School News and Upcoming Events

- Presented by Ms. Dana Stern, Head of Lower School, on behalf of Ms. Anastasia Kelly, Head of Middle School, who accompanied the 8th grade class on their overnight trip to Rocking Horse Ranch.
- Middle School opened with new schedules, spaces, and expanded academic offerings. Highlights include an Introduction to Anatomy course for eighth grade and new writing courses for sixth and seventh grades, reinforcing a commitment to rigorous and engaging instruction.

- More than 90 middle school students are participating in fall sports, reflecting strong extracurricular engagement. N-Block classes will begin next week, and programs such as Science Olympiad and Model UN will commence later in the semester.
- Back-to-School Night for Middle School is scheduled later this month, with additional opportunities for families to explore Walsh Hall facilities. Regular communication will continue via Sunday emails, and the “MS Happenings” document will serve as a central repository for updates and information.
- The Spark Institute Saturday enrichment program, “Learning Without Limits,” will run a six-week session beginning October 10; registration is open through the SRDS website and Happenings.

V. Admissions Update

- Mr. Geoffrey Bowman, Director of Admissions, welcomed new and returning families and thanked them for choosing Saddle River Day School.
- Admissions closed the previous cycle with record strength, and the school opened this year with just under 615 students (up from 585 last year), reflecting sustained growth and community confidence.
- About 80% of accepted students chose to enroll, which is an excellent rate compared to similar schools. Ninth Grade enrollment met and slightly exceeded its target with selective admissions and a waitlist.
- Fall admissions events include multiple open houses:
 - Wednesday, September 23 at 9:00 a.m. (Early Childhood),
 - Saturday, October 3 at 10:00 a.m. (K–12, aligned with Homecoming),
 - Tuesday, October 27 at 6:00 p.m. (K–12),
 - Monday, November 2 at 9:00 a.m. (Pre-K/K).
- The school welcomed three exchange students this year: Valentina (9th) and Sol (10th) from Madrid, and Guillermo (“G,” 9th) from Brazil. Families interested in hosting may contact admissions for more information.
- A survey to new families will be sent in the coming weeks to gather feedback on admissions, onboarding, and marketing processes, with the goal of continuous improvement.

VI. Upper School News and Upcoming Events

- Dr. Shai Zacaraev, Head of Upper School, introduced himself and talked about the grade-level overnight trips and field trips to foster the sense of community and set a positive tone for the academic year. 9th graders were at Pocono Valley Resort; 10th graders were at Camelback for team building; juniors were visiting Gravity Vault and completing a college tour; seniors were on campus for a college application workshop, followed by an annual boat trip the next day.
- Seniors celebrated the Senior Sunrise tradition that kicked off the year, together with a year-end Senior Sunset gathering at the Walsh patio, marking the beginning and the end of the senior experience with meaningful community moments. A photo from Senior Sunrise will be

shared with families.

VII. Community Engagement at SRDS

- Ms. Chris Lebovits, Director of Community Engagement and Assistant Director of LS Admissions, introduced herself and outlined a calendar of community engagement events and parents' programs, designed to build connections across divisions:
- A Paint & Sip event led by an external vendor will take place in Main Hall with light refreshments; the event is relaxed and open to all comfort levels.
- Restorative Yoga offered by the Center for Mind Body Balance provides a low-barrier opportunity for relaxation; no prior experience or flexibility is required.
- Mahjong offerings include several three-part beginner series (participants need to complete one three-part series to join open play) and open-play sessions for those with basic familiarity. The program is hosted by a member of the SRDS community who has started a mahjong business.
- The Rebel Readers Book Club for parents/guardians continues, with the current title "Mad Mabel." The start time is 7:00 p.m., and listings will be corrected to reflect that time consistently.
- A Lower School parent mindfulness evening with Danielle Larson will provide strategies to reinforce at home the same techniques students learn during the school day.
- Pickup basketball for parents/guardians will run twice weekly in the gym and will support the Rebels Athletic Club through participation fees.
- Families will receive a follow-up email summarizing these opportunities. The Parents Guild will also send a weekly "envelope" from parentsguild@saddleriverday.org; families should check spam folders and contact the Parents Guild if not receiving messages.

VIII. SRDS Technology Update

- Ms. Laura Hollis, Director of Technology, introduced herself and thanked the technology team for their hard work over the summer.
- She mentioned SRDS's student-centered technology philosophy that prioritizes authentic opportunities for leadership and creation. Students contribute to social media, produce video content, manage digital signage, and operate in the Rebel Vision Studio.
- Summer upgrades included 25 BenQ interactive boards installed in Walsh Hall classrooms, 12 Bloomberg terminals set up for the finance lab, and a high-tech conference room equipped with a PTZ camera, integrated ceiling microphones and speakers, and large-format displays for seamless wireless conferencing.
- A 216-inch video wall powered by NovaSign software is now available for digital signage, event highlights, and community programming, including club announcements and weather tickers.
- A new innovation space, provisionally called "The Hive," will house VR headsets, two 3D printers, and host guest speakers, extending the school's capacity for hands-on, future-facing

learning.

- The VR course, co-taught with Mr. Peddi, will meet weekly in person and once weekly in evening VR sessions. Students will continue building a city aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals using the Arkio VR app; they will 3D print models and, if plans proceed, participate in a February trip to Reykjavik to engage with a tech conference and collaborate with the Arkio team.
- Media and design programs include new video cameras for Lower and Middle School use in the Rebel Vision Studio, two sections of the Upper School videography class, and planning for an LA immersive trip focused on film and videography industry exposure.
- She reminded families of the BYOD policy (Mac, PC, or Chromebook as primary device; tablets not permitted as primary), the requirement that Middle and Upper School students sign the Acceptable Use Policy, and the Google Workspace consent form for parents. VPNs are not allowed on student devices. AI governance meetings are ongoing, an AI Day is planned for October, and students will present at conferences about AI tools they are building.

IX. SRDS Enrichment Programs

- Dr. Erica Cohen, Director of Enrichment Programs & US Learning Specialist, introduced herself and outlined her role in running various enrichment programs.
- She mentioned that Coaching Academy, the After-School Sports Club, and the Music Institute launched successfully this week. She thanked families for monitoring class schedules and for registering with the Pikmykid dismissal app.
- She explained that Pikmykid allows parents or guardians to mark arrival at pickup and generates a verification code for staff, ensuring that children are released only to authorized adults. Families are encouraged to add babysitters, nannies, or grandparents as delegates. Some new families are still being onboarded; instructions will be re-sent, and tutorials are available at approximately 4:20 p.m. during Coaching Academy dismissal.
- Offerings this cycle include returning favorites and new classes, such as Mad Science with Dr. DNA, Chess, a Running Club, and Friday Cooking with Chef Angie. Chess now features four annual tournaments on campus with options for rated and unrated play.
- The Music Institute will hold a spring recital for students in solo lessons (primarily piano and voice, with additional instruments as available).
- Coaching Academy runs on three cycles (fall, winter, spring). Popular classes like etiquette will be offered again in winter, and late sign-ups will be accommodated where space allows. The enrichment team can be reached at coachingacademy@saddleriverday.org for support.

X. Scheduling, Portal, and Schoology

- Ms. Deirdre Angrick, the SRDS Academic Head, introduced herself as a primary point of contact for questions related to scheduling, the parent portal, and Schoology. Middle and Upper School parents will be onboarded to Schoology within the next couple of weeks, and an email with instructions will be provided.

XI. RAC Update

- Ms. Jodi Ramasamy, President of REBELS Athletic Club, introduced herself and mentioned that the REBELS Athletic Club (RAC) supports athletics across the entire SRDS community and aims to connect younger students with Varsity and JV athletes and coaches. Clinics are offered for grades 1–8, providing exposure to sports fundamentals and role-modeling from Upper School athletes.
- Upcoming opportunities include Volleyball and Cross-Country clinics. There are also soccer “ball runner” roles at home games that are well-suited for Lower School and Middle School students seeking game-day involvement.
- Families should join the GroupSpot app for athletics communications. The “RAC” group aggregates all team schedules into one calendar, while Middle and Upper School teams maintain their own GroupSpot channels for team-specific updates. The RAC team can be contacted at rac@saddleriverday.org.

XII. Parents Guild News and Upcoming Events

- Parents Guild executive board members, committee chairs, division reps, and class parents were introduced. The PG has consolidated weekly communications into a single letter sent from parentsguild@saddleriverday.org; families should check spam folders and contact the Parents Guild if messages are not received.
- Ladies’ Night Out will take place on November 11 at The Tides with an Italian “La Dolce Vita”-style theme designed to foster connection and community, in addition to fundraising.
- Information about “One Click” donations for class baskets will be included in the weekly letter.
- Monthly Parents Guild coffees will continue; the first will be on September 25 at Panera (Tice’s Corner) at 8:00 a.m. after morning drop-off. These are casual, drop-in opportunities to socialize.
- The next PG Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 1, 2026 at 8:30 a.m. in Alford Hall - PAC. The meeting was closed with a Motion to Adjourn.