SRDS Parents Guild Meeting

Thursday, October 1, 2026

I. Welcome & Approval of September 2026 Minutes

Alana Murphy and Cadien Mayers, Co-Presidents of the Parents Guild, welcomed attendees in person and on Zoom and started this month's Parents Guild meeting with the approval of the September 2026 meeting minutes.

II. Welcome from SRDS Board of Trustees

• Mr. Wes Powell, SRDS Board of Trustees President, announced that the Head of School's responsibilities had expanded to include serving as Chief Executive Officer. Mr. Powell said that Mr. Desai would continue as Head of School while taking on added responsibility for the school's growth. SRDS Board is planning to hire an academic head of school to start in fall 2027. Mr. Desai later clarified that the new senior leader would support academic work and day-to-day operations.

• Mr. Powell emphasized the school's mission to teach each student according to their individual needs and potential. He encouraged faculty and staff to see students not only by their grade level, but also by the contributions they might make in the future.

• He described the new building as a welcome addition that has given students more space to study, work, and gather. The school also had acquired neighboring property for possible future expansion.

• He mentioned that SRDS aspired to become the best school in the world.

III. Update from SRDS Head of School

• Mr. Jalaj Desai, SRDS Head of School, welcomed everyone and reported that the latest rankings placed Saddle River Day School first among college-preparatory schools in Bergen County and that the school had improved its national standing. He also cited the school's College Board Platinum recognition for AP exam performance.

• He announced that the middle and upper school dress code would be enforced beginning October 15th. He encouraged families to support students in dressing appropriately and showing school spirit.

• He noted that more than 80 colleges had requested campus visits. He said visiting representatives would observe the broader school community, including how students dress, behave, and participate.

• Mr. Desai said Saddle River Day School had been leading sessions with the New Jersey Association of Independent Schools about responsible AI use, AI governance, and AI literacy. He said the school was considering issues such as data privacy and relevant laws, and that more information would be shared with families.

IV. Parents Guild Update

• Parents Guild Ladies' Night Out Co-chairs Brittany Baker and Julia Lubin presented plans for the November 11th Ladies' Night Out, which will have a "La Dolce Vita" theme. They described the event as an opportunity to bring the community together while supporting the school.

• They suggested either a polished casual outfit or cocktail attire, with warm fall colors as inspiration.

• Three featured raffles were announced. One will benefit the Wounded Warrior Project and veterans' families, another will offer a $1,000 cash prize, and the third will feature a mystery luxury designer leather item.

• Several vendors are expected to participate, including sellers of gifts and wine, custom accessories, and eyewear. A portion of vendor sales will be donated to the school.

• The co-chairs invited families to register, sponsor the event, donate, or volunteer. They encouraged new families to attend, explaining that tables organized by grade can help parents meet others in their children's classes.

• They also promoted an all-inclusive wellness weekend in the Berkshires in late January. Registration will include a $175-per-night credit for private classes or spa services.

• The Parents Guild asked families to support its One Click fundraiser. The suggested contribution is $100 per child, but families could choose an amount that suited them. Contributions help fund Parents Guild activities throughout the year, including event expenses and raffle baskets.

• Homecoming was announced for the upcoming Saturday, October 3rd, from noon to 4:00 p.m. The school planned games and other activities, and Rebel Gear for lower, middle, and upper school students would be available for purchase.

• Other upcoming PG events include Cars and Coffee for dads and children on Sunday October 11th, as well as a Halloween Trunk and Treat on October 30th. Volunteers were invited to decorate cars, and families were asked to donate individually wrapped, nut-free candy.

• The SRDS school spirit store near North Hall would be open after school on Mondays and Wednesdays after school from 3:15 - 4:15pm.

• October PG coffee in Panera Bread was announced for later in October. Families were encouraged to check school communications for the confirmed details.

V. Upper School News and Upcoming Events

• Dr. Shai Zacaraev, Head of Upper School, reported that student retreats had gone well. Ninth graders visited Pocono Valley Resort, Tenth graders visited Camelback Resort, Eleventh graders participated in a picnic and college tour, and Seniors worked on college applications before taking part in the annual boat trip.

• He mentioned students were making effective use of the new building's study and gathering spaces.

• The school had held a club fair with more than 50 clubs presenting. Just under 50 clubs were expected to operate during the year, with students leading most of the activities.

• School Spirit Week was underway, including Pink Out Day. A pep rally was planned for the new turf field, and the Upper School Homecoming dance was expected to take place in the Performing Arts Center on October 2nd.

• An Upper School student described the school's partnership with the Childhood Cancer Society and promoted an upcoming benefit dinner at Ridgewood Country Club. More than 200 people had reportedly registered by the time of the meeting.

• The student requested donations for raffle and auction items, such as gift cards, restaurant or spa experiences, jewelry, artwork, and vacation stays. Funds raised will support children with cancer and their families.

VI. SRDS Fund and Fall Day of Giving

• Mrs. Lynn McCormack, Director of Development, explained that Saddle River Day School is a nonprofit organization and that philanthropy helps enhance the students' educational experience.

• She identified four current avenues for giving: The SRDS Fund, The Building the Future Capital Campaign, The Parents Guild, and the Rebels Athletic Club.

• She described The SRDS Fund as an unrestricted, tax-deductible annual gift. The unrestricted nature of the fund allows the Head of School to direct contributions toward immediate needs, unexpected expenses, or new opportunities.

• The Fall Day of Giving was expected to launch in late October. She encouraged participation from current families, alumni, former families, and faculty. Families could give online, by check or cash, by transferring stock, through a donor-advised fund or family foundation, or by making a pledge. Pledges could be paid through June 30th, the end of the school's fiscal year.

• Families interested in major gifts to The Capital Campaign were invited to contact Mrs. McCormack, Mr. Desai, or Mr. Powell.

VII. Middle School News and Upcoming Events

• Ms. Anastasia Kelly, Head of Middle School, said students were settling into their schedules and reminded families to consult the school's Happenings Document and email updates for all information.

• Upcoming Middle School activities included grade-level parent coffees, the start of the SPARK Institute, a science-themed boot camp, an eighth-grade visit to the Jack O'Lantern Blaze, and a Halloween social for students in grades Five through Seven.

• Middle school parent-teacher conferences were planned for late October. Ms. Kelly described the conferences as a drop-in format in which parents could visit teachers in designated areas.

• She reported that the National STEM Honor Society had 56 members, including 34 new

inductees. The Middle School Science Olympiad had also started, and Model UN was expected to begin later in the month.

VIII. Community Engagement at SRDS

• Presented by Ms. Anastasia Kelly, Head of Middle School, on behalf of Ms. Chris Lebovits, Director of Community Engagement and Assistant Director of LS Admissions. She outlined a calendar of community engagement events and parents' programs, designed to build connections across divisions

• She noted that spaces remained for some community activities, including mahjong, a paint-and-sip event, and book club.

IX. Lower School News and Upcoming Events

• Presented by Ms. Anastasia Kelly, Head of Middle School, on behalf of Ms. Dana Stern, Head of Lower School.

• Lower School announcements included parent coffees, parent-teacher conferences requiring advance sign-up, a Hispanic Heritage Month assembly, and continuing mindfulness lessons.

• The school planned healthy-food workshops for Kindergarten and First-grade students.

• A global learning exchange was planned to connect students in grades One through Four with peers at the Malawi Children's Mission. The school planned to share more information with families.

• A Fourth-grade pink pop-up shop was planned to raise money for cancer-related causes.

• She reiterated that the school would return to enforcing the dress code on October 15th, and encouraged families to consult school communications for details about dates, registration, and Lower School events.

X. Academic Courses and Registration Update

• Ms. Deirdre Angrick, SRDS Academic Dean, reminded parents in grades Five through Twelve to use Schoology to view class pages, assignments, due dates, grades, syllabi, and grading information.

• She invited parents who had not received access codes or needed help accessing Schoology to contact her. She also said she will look into questions she could not immediately answer.

• She mentioned student schedules were settling. She described the late-October conference arrangements: Lower School conferences would be scheduled separately, while Middle and Upper School conferences would use a walk-in format.

• She noted that faculty members had professional development opportunities planned in areas including English, World Languages, and Music.

• As Math Department Chair, Ms. Angrick announced a Kangaroo Math team competition for students from Kindergarten through grade Twelve. Parents were asked to tell her whether their children wanted to participate; she would register students and organize teams, generally by grade level.

• She also mentioned an upcoming Upper School math competition at Cornell and MathCon practice tests for students in grades Four through Twelve. The MathCon competition itself was expected to take place later in the school year.

XI. Athletics Update

• Mr. PJ Petrow, The Athletic Director, reported strong participation in Middle School cross country, volleyball, tennis, and soccer.

• Upper School boys' soccer had won an overtime game and had a reported record of 7–2–1. Girls' volleyball had won matches at all three levels.

• Girls' tennis was continuing tournament play, and a school player had won the Bergen County singles championship. The cross-country team was preparing for the Shore Coaches Invitational.

• Girls' soccer was reported to have an 8–0 record.

• Homecoming athletic events were scheduled for Saturday, October 3rd, and included volleyball, tennis, and soccer games. Families were encouraged to attend and support the teams.

• Soccer and tennis clinics for students in grades One through Eight were planned for the morning of October 23rd. He also mentioned an alumni cocktail party and encouraged families to follow updates through GroupSpot.

XII. Parents Guild Upcoming Events and Motion to Adjourn

• Alana Murphy and Cadien Mayers, Co-Presidents of the Parents Guild, encouraged everyone to join the Homecoming on Saturday, October 3rd.

• Monthly Parents Guild coffees will continue; the next one will be Tuesday, October 20th, at Panera Bread (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, November 5th, 2026 at 8:30 a.m. in Alford Hall - PAC. The meeting was closed with a Motion to Adjourn.