Some portions of this report are sensitive and graphic. It is not intended for children.
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I. Introduction

Debevoise & Plimpton LLP (“Debevoise”) was retained in June 2021 to investigate allegations concerning inappropriate behavior or sexual misconduct by adults employed at Sonoma Academy (“SA”), prompted by allegations concerning a former teacher, Marco Morrone. Morrone taught various humanities courses at SA from 2002 to 2020, when his employment was terminated by the current Head of School, Tucker Foehl.

During the time Morrone taught at SA, he was perceived by many to be an excellent, dynamic teacher, whose classes were popular with students. By the start of his third year of teaching at the school, however, people began to notice and comment on the close nature of his relationships with female students. Certain complaints about his conduct were raised at that time to SA administrators by students and/or their family members. These early concerns involved Morrone recommending a sexually explicit book to a female student and spending a noticeable amount of time alone with female students. Male students also complained to SA employees that Morrone gave favorable treatment to certain female students. As a result, the former Head of School, Janet Durgin, warned Morrone about this conduct no later than 2006. In 2007, the most specific of these complaints was raised by an SA student directly to senior SA administrators; Durgin became fully aware of the details of the complaint. At that time, the student specifically alleged that Morrone had sexually harassed her, by making several sexualized comments about her, and pinched her twice. Morrone accepted the consequence imposed by SA, which required him to see a human resources consultant. Morrone spent 2.5 hours with the consultant; it was reported back to SA that he “readily admitted that he engaged in inappropriate behavior toward students and expressed both shame and remorse for having had ‘an adverse influence on kids.’” The consultant described him as “both receptive and cooperative throughout the session.”
The consultant specifically recommended to Durgin that Morrone’s behavior be “monitored” as Morrone was “in a developmental process in which some of his learning is relatively new and not yet fully incorporated into his consciousness and, therefore, behavior.” Such monitoring, however, did not occur. Until 2020, Morrone continued to engage in a wide range of conduct with largely, although not exclusively, female students at SA that crossed appropriate teacher-student boundaries and resulted in students experiencing inappropriately sexualized interactions with Morrone. In short, he did not change his behavior. Examples of inappropriate behavior that continued after his counseling included: encouraging directly or indirectly intimate, sexual, and deeply personal journal entries as part of class assignments; inappropriately touching students; developing close emotional bonds with students through one-on-one meetings and emails; recommending graphic, sexually explicit or mature books; and giving students copies of his own sexually explicit manuscripts, one of which detailed a graphic sexual relationship between a student and her high school teacher. Some students found these interactions flattering, while others were confused, and several reported feeling like Morrone was flirting with them. Other students observed and were able to corroborate the nature of these interactions. Many students reported that they had either witnessed or heard credible reports of Morrone having a sexual relationship with another teacher, which only served to reinforce the sexualized nature of their own experiences with Morrone. With respect to male students, Morrone was often overly physically aggressive, including a few instances where such aggression led to students being injured.

Very few reports were made to the administration about Morrone’s conduct. Over the years, however, various rumors and reports surfaced about Morrone’s behavior and some attempts were made by Durgin and Ellie Dwight, the current Assistant Head of School, to assess
the veracity of those allegations. The responses to these concerns were inconsistent and lacked sufficient documentation. While some students may have been briefly questioned about alleged inappropriate conduct, no action was taken, including when Durgin and Dwight received a 2012 letter that included a list of six alumnae who were described as having been subject to Morrone’s sexually harassing behaviors from his early time at SA. Notwithstanding the rumors, Durgin believed she lacked what she termed “new” allegations, and she saw Morrone as a popular and engaged educator; in short, she believed that his prior problems had been addressed.

Witnesses described a number of reasons they did not complain about Morrone at the time. Many former students described Morrone’s boundary-crossing behaviors as being “normalized” by SA’s culture, which encouraged close interactions between students and faculty. There was also a widespread belief among witnesses that adults at SA must have known about Morrone’s close interactions with certain female students because they believed it was apparent to SA’s small, tight-knit community. In cases where they did perceive boundary crossing, students feared that their experiences would not be perceived as sufficiently serious, or believed that administrators were not interested in hearing about Morrone’s misconduct. It is clear that had SA more thoroughly evaluated the content that Morrone encouraged students to reveal in free writing, for example, his misconduct would have been detected long ago.

The school’s Code of Conduct, which was officially promulgated by 2014, prohibited faculty from engaging in the exact behaviors witnesses attributed to Morrone, including having “sexually related conversations in the presence of students,” “discussing their personal problems with students,” and “having secrets of a personal nature with students.” Over the last two years, SA’s outside counsel has assisted the school in implementing a more robust set of policies
governing boundaries between students and faculty, and has conducted further training for faculty on this topic.

In August 2020, three SA alumnae approached the new Head of School, Tucker Foehl, with allegations from 2007 that Morrone had relationships with his female students that violated appropriate boundaries. The day after hearing from those alumnae, SA contacted the Oppenheimer Investigations Group LLP (the “Oppenheimer Group”) about conducting a limited investigation into the allegations to determine whether Morrone’s employment should be terminated. Based on the Oppenheimer Group’s findings that Morrone had engaged in conduct that violated appropriate boundaries with students who were members of the SA classes of 2008 through 2014, Foehl terminated Morrone’s employment in November 2020.

Between November 2020 and June 2021, SA alumni continued to raise concerns (which included new allegations and details) about Morrone. In light of the continued allegations regarding Morrone, the Board of Trustees of SA (the “Board”) determined that a broader review of Morrone and events at SA was warranted. Specifically, SA and the Board authorized Debevoise to conduct an independent investigation into any matters concerning inappropriate behavior or sexual misconduct toward SA students at any time by Morrone or by other current or former SA employees or volunteers. Debevoise was further tasked with determining what knowledge current or former SA employees or trustees had of any inappropriate behavior or sexual misconduct, and any actions taken as a result of such knowledge.

This investigation has revealed a number of missed opportunities to do more for students at SA and has uncovered important instances of harmful conduct by adults associated with SA towards its students, including boundary crossing by Morrone and serious sexual misconduct by two other former employees. Generally, when it came to Morrone, adults were too focused on
whether something physical and sexual had “happened” to students and did not pay enough attention to the psychological and emotional impact of Morrone’s conduct. At the same time, alumni and adults continued to ask important questions over the years, which ultimately has allowed the dangers associated with Morrone’s inappropriate boundary crossing to be fully explored.

In addition, and as discussed below, the Board and SA’s willingness to authorize this broad reaching, independent inquiry has surfaced information concerning two other adults associated with SA who engaged in repeated sexual acts with underage SA students. The first, Shannon Rake, was an assistant girls’ soccer coach in the Fall of 2002 and Fall of 2003. Debevoise concludes that she sexually abused one female student, and that her employment with SA was terminated after the school learned of the abuse. The second, Adrian Belic, taught a short course at SA in January 2004. Debevoise concludes that he sexually abused one female student on multiple occasions and sexually abused a second student on one occasion. At least one administrator knew about Belic’s abuse after his course ended. Belic did not return to the school.

This document contains Debevoise’s key findings and will principally cover four subjects: (1) instances of Marco Morrone’s inappropriate contact and conduct with SA students; (2) two former SA employees, Shannon Rake and Adrian Belic, who groomed SA students and engaged in repeated sexual acts with them, while they were minors; (3) knowledge of the SA administration and faculty regarding these two topics; and (4) recommendations for how SA’s

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1 Debevoise was retained by the Board to conduct an independent investigation. While the investigators conducted their investigation independently and with strict confidentiality regarding the identity of certain witnesses, the Board is a client of Debevoise, and this document does not constitute a waiver of the Board’s attorney-client privilege.
policies should be further strengthened to prevent future instances of inappropriate boundary crossing.

Debevoise recognizes that throughout this time period, SA was a brand new school that quickly established itself as a premier academic high school. For the most part, even students who had negative experiences with Morrone and, in some cases, the administration, had very positive things to say about their interactions with other teachers and their education more broadly. Debevoise has observed that the leadership of SA is committed to ensuring that important lessons are learned from this painful chapter, which will further strengthen the school and its community.

II. Scope of Investigation

In June 2021, a letter was sent to all members of the SA community, with available contact information, announcing the Debevoise investigation. The letter urged anyone with information about allegations of inappropriate behavior or sexual misconduct committed by Morrone or any other current or former SA employee or volunteer to contact Debevoise. In addition, Debevoise contacted many individuals directly, including sending emails to members of each graduating class, individuals who were mentioned by other witnesses, and individuals whose names appeared in relevant documents. SA provided us with all existing contact information for alumni, and if an individual’s contact information was not available, we conducted our own research to identify contact information.

In total, Debevoise interviewed 133 individuals including alumni, current and former faculty, staff, trustees, current and former SA parents, and others with relevant information. The selection of witnesses to interview was entirely made by Debevoise.
Debevoise made requests of SA and of certain witnesses for documents. SA complied with all of our requests for documents, to the extent such documents existed at the time of our work. After Debevoise made decisions about which documents to collect, a total of over 61,000 documents were reviewed. These included emails, personnel files, yearbooks, and other records.

The investigators carefully analyzed all information in order to make their determinations about the credibility of what they learned. The investigators considered, among other things, whether the information was provided by someone with direct knowledge, whether there were multiple sources for the information, and whether contemporaneous documentation or eyewitness reports corroborated the information. Debevoise also considered the similarities in witnesses’ experiences, which further corroborated the information provided by witnesses about their interactions with Morrone.

In the course of our investigation, a number of witnesses raised concerns about SA’s failure to make mandated reports under the California Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act (“CANRA”). In light of these concerns, we reviewed SA administrators’ responses to incidents of student-on-student sexual assault brought to our attention where a mandated report under CANRA was not made or was significantly delayed.

III. Limitations

The findings in this document are limited to information that the investigators could obtain through voluntary interviews and documentary evidence. To minimize additional trauma to potential victims, we chose to email former students that may have been impacted by Morrone’s conduct or that may have had knowledge that could corroborate other witnesses’ accounts. In some instances, individuals contacted by the investigators did not respond to our emails or declined to speak with Debevoise, which is a choice that the investigators respect.
Other witnesses, including Morrone and the two other adults who had sexual interactions with SA students, refused our request for an interview. Both the current and former Heads of School voluntarily met with us and answered all of our questions.

IV. Naming Conventions and Confidentiality

In deciding whether to name in this document individuals accused of misconduct, Debevoise engaged in a holistic assessment regarding that conduct and balanced several factors, including: (i) the severity of the conduct, including whether the conduct involved physical or emotional coercion; (ii) the credibility of the evidence obtained and the investigators’ ability to corroborate that evidence; (iii) the source of the information; (iv) whether the school received an earlier report of the misconduct and how the school responded to such a report; and (v) whether naming the individual would necessarily reveal the identity of a victim of misconduct.

Debevoise specifically took into consideration the fact that Morrone had been publicly accused of inappropriate behavior and sexual misconduct in the press prior to the commencement of the investigation.

Additionally, when deciding whether to name in this document individuals aware of misconduct, Debevoise considered the individual’s body of knowledge, position of authority, and supervisory role.

Many of the witnesses who agreed to be interviewed requested anonymity and we have honored those requests in conducting the investigation and in preparing this document. In reporting our findings, Debevoise is sensitive to the fact that a number of the witnesses with whom we spoke are still employed by SA. We have not reported on certain facts if they were not necessary to our findings and their disclosure might unnecessarily impact reputations, damage
current and future personal or working relationships, or make the identity of the reporter apparent.

V. Marco Morrone

The vast majority of witnesses interviewed by Debevoise spoke about their experiences and observations of Marco Morrone. We spoke to alumni from nearly every class who attended SA during the time that he was a teacher. While many witnesses pointed to positive classroom experiences, a number of troubling themes developed from these witness interviews and the consistency of accounts across many years from female students was striking: (1) Morrone picked favorites, almost exclusively female students, who received extra attention, feedback and praise; (2) Morrone sought out opportunities to be alone with these female students, either on or off campus, and sometimes in one-on-one martial arts classes in a windowless room on campus; (3) multiple witnesses described Morrone as identifying emotional vulnerabilities in female students and pursuing an “intimate” or “special” relationship with these female students; (4) Morrone made sexually charged remarks to female students, effectively solicited sexual writing from students, and assigned readings of sexually explicit and graphic texts; and (5) at a certain point, with some students, Morrone would “turn” on the students, abruptly withdrawing his attention from them; this led to even greater levels of anxiety and confusion among students.

We did not find evidence that Morrone had a sexual relationship with a then-current SA student. However, we credit one account of Morrone kissing a student’s head. Many witnesses also observed Morrone touching female students in intimate ways, such as on the back or the leg; to teenage girls, this behavior was highly confusing and contributed to their belief that Morrone was interested in a sexual relationship with them.
We believe that Morrone was engaged in grooming behavior that, with at least one student, led to sexual contact after the student graduated from high school.

A. Background

Marco Morrone began teaching at SA in 2002. Before starting at SA, Morrone worked as a product manager at an education software company and a project manager at an education non-profit. His teaching experience included stints at two schools: he taught at Redwood High School in Larkspur, California (1998 to 2000) and at the Wilbraham & Monson Academy in Wilbraham, MA (1992 to 1995). Morrone received a B.A. from Williams College and an M.A. from the University of Texas at Austin.

At SA, Morrone was a faculty member of the Humanities department where he primarily taught courses to juniors and seniors, including English, History, and electives, such as Creative Writing and Economics. In addition, as part of SA’s “Exploratory” program, in which faculty members develop non-academic classes relating to their personal interests, Morrone taught martial arts to SA students. He also invited select students to take one-on-one lessons with him.

Morrone was a popular teacher; witnesses recalled hearing about him from their older siblings or family friends, and taking his class was something they eagerly anticipated. Many witnesses shared that he was an influential teacher in their high school experience, calling him “charismatic,” “engaging,” and “the best teacher ever.” Former students as well as parents noted that Morrone was a handsome teacher, and many alumnae recalled having a “crush” on Morrone.

B. Findings of Misconduct and Inappropriate Behavior Committed by Morrone

1. Marco’s Girls

Debevoise learned that Morrone gave special treatment and attention to certain female students each year at SA, and that these girls were widely known by their peers and by some
adults at SA as “Marco’s Girls.” Witnesses noted that these favored students were described as attractive young women who excelled in the humanities. Additionally, there were persistent rumors that Morrone had sexual relationships with at least some of these girls. These rumors were so widespread that witnesses who attended the school from 2004 to 2021 had heard them.

We spoke directly with 25 alumnae between the classes of 2005 and 2021 who perceived themselves as being favored by Morrone and we conclude were subject to misconduct. Based on the information available to us, we have identified a total of 34 such girls, even though they may not have spoken to us. Documents and other witness statements corroborated these accounts. We also heard the names of other students who were perceived to be favored by Morrone, but we did not have enough information about the exact nature of their relationships with Morrone to form a conclusion.

Some of the witnesses who received special attention from Morrone had heard the term “Marco’s Girl” as students and considered themselves part of that group. Others had either not heard the term as students or did not consider themselves part of that group, but nevertheless reported experiencing many of Morrone’s inappropriate behaviors. Importantly, most of Morrone’s favored students perceived their interactions with him at the time as being overtly sexual. For example, one described feeling like Morrone wanted to “date” her; another wondered if Morrone was going to kiss her when they were alone. Their perceptions were fueled by the persistent rumors about Morrone’s alleged sexual interactions with current or former students. These witnesses were also aware of Morrone’s rumored affair with an SA colleague, which investigators found was substantiated by documentary evidence, an eyewitness account by

While Debevoise finds that Morrone targeted female students, we are aware of at least one male student who experienced Morrone’s boundary crossing conduct.
several students, and another SA employee’s recollection. This reinforced students’ perceptions that Morrone was available and interested in sexual interactions.

A smaller group of favored students saw him only as a very close mentor and trusted adult at the time. Some witnesses who viewed Morrone this way in high school, however, have come over time to regard their interactions with him as inappropriate and overly sexualized. Several women noted that they saw Morrone differently after experiencing appropriate boundaries in college or the workplace. Others reported reevaluating their interactions with Morrone in light of recent reports regarding his termination.

The intensity of each former student’s experience with Morrone and the impact of their interactions with him varied, but their statements revealed a familiar and consistent pattern of conduct, as detailed below. Some witnesses shared with Debevoise that they wanted to speak to investigators to protect future students from this conduct.

(a)  **Free Writing Assignments Prompted Students to Make Deeply Personal Disclosures to Morrone**

Students favored by Morrone described developing an intense and personal “relationship” with him, which often began with journaling exercises called “free writing.” As described by numerous witnesses, Morrone required students in all of his classes to write a certain number of pages each day or week on any topic, regardless of its relevance to the curriculum. They were further instructed that if they wrote entries that they wanted to remain private, they could fold down the page and Morrone would refrain from reading it. Morrone emphasized that no topic was off limits, but that there might be certain topics that he would be obligated to report to other adults at SA or in his capacity as a mandated reporter under CANRA.

Witnesses recalled writing about deeply personal topics such as sexual abuse, self-harm, mental health struggles, family traumas, and their own sexual experiences. Witnesses told us
that they were inspired, either directly or indirectly, to write about such topics because Morrone gave them more attention or comments on their writing if they revealed personal issues in their lives. For example, witnesses recalled Morrone writing “you are the most interesting person I have ever met,” and “you are fascinating,” as well as “tell me more” and “kinky.” Two students wrote about their attraction to Morrone; however, they folded these pages down or otherwise indicated to Morrone that the text should remain private. In contrast, those who did not write about such subjects were given neutral feedback, or none at all. Several witnesses reported being uncomfortable or upset about the personal information they shared with Morrone as teenagers.

Debevoise has reviewed many free writing examples to confirm these accounts. In reviewing one favored student’s writing, investigators found that Morrone made comments like “this is great” or “funny” on the student’s explicit and deeply personal entries about relationships, love, and sex. In other instances, he provided his own thoughts on the content, for example: “I think your idea of love is pretty terrific – you keep returning to it. Your experiences, however, seem like a different story.” The student also directed an entry to Morrone specifically, telling him that he made her feel good. In response to that entry, he commented: “I’m glad to feel this connected to you.” At the end of another free write submission, he commented: “I want you to keep writing because I want to get to know you well enough to write something substantial back to you. Does that make sense?”

The importance that Morrone placed on free writing was also well known among faculty and staff at SA. One witness reported that Morrone would walk into another faculty member’s classroom during class to return students’ journals as if he wanted to get them back to the students immediately. Current and former faculty also recalled that Morrone could be seen reading stacks of journals around SA’s campus.
While the evidence showed that Morrone brought concerns about the content of students’ “free writes” to members of the administration or counselling staff from time to time, three witnesses detailed sharing information about abuse that likely should have been reported under CANRA, including the possibility of non-consensual sexual contact, and do not recall anyone ever following up with them for such a report.

(b) Sexually Explicit Readings Made Students Question Morrone’s Intentions

Many witnesses described that they were sometimes uncomfortable in class because reading assignments or film screenings included explicit sexual content. Some witnesses reported that Morrone furthered the feeling of an inappropriate relationship between them by personally recommending books with strong sexual content for them to read. In particular, Morrone repeatedly engaged his favorite female students in conversation about Lolita and the empathy the author, Vladimir Nabokov, was able to engender for the pedophile—he personally gave copies of Lolita to at least three students, and recommended it to several others. These recommendations continued even after Durgin specifically prohibited Morrone from recommending the text. Morrone also recommended additional texts to his students that are widely considered to be pornographic or explicit.

In addition, Debevoise learned that Morrone gave at least five students copies of his own manuscripts to read. Witnesses who received the drafts described them as “super sexually explicit,” and “sexually mature,” and recalled that the texts contained multiple sex scenes, including, in one case, an explicit anal sex scene.

One witness reported that Morrone told her that he based a romantic interest in his book on her and allowed her to read it. Debevoise has reviewed this manuscript. In addition to being sexually explicit, the draft novel told the story of a teacher who had sexual desires for his female
student, read confidential pages of her journal, and failed to appropriately report her suicidal ideations. At the end of the novel, when the protagonist is confronted by his department chair about his inappropriate relationships with students, the chair says that the teacher is unlikely to be fired, telling the teacher that the school would “look as bad as you do,” if it took action after twenty years of ignoring the teacher’s conduct.

Some witnesses who received book recommendations or a manuscript from Morrone reported feeling embarrassed or surprised once they realized the sexual content of the works; others thought he was trying to engage them intellectually. Several reported avoiding discussing the texts with him because they were uncomfortable. Morrone’s recommendations, as well as his use of sexual materials in class, added to students’ perception that Morrone was sexually interested in them.

(c) Inappropriate Comments Made Students Uncomfortable and Nervous to be Alone with Morrone

Witnesses described a pattern of inappropriate comments that Morrone made to them that, at the time or in retrospect, indicated Morrone had a romantic interest in them. One witness shared that he told her, “they didn’t make them like you when I was in high school” and a second told investigators that Morrone mentioned that she would not “have any trouble attracting guys in college.” Yet another witness reported that when attempting to schedule a time to talk to Morrone, he replied, “I would take any excuse to talk to you more.”

One witness observed that Morrone had a way of making her “feel unique” by complimenting her on traits that others did not notice. This made her “feel emotionally comfortable” with him.

Additionally, Debevoise reviewed lengthy, personal, and overtly flirtatious emails from Morrone to his students. These emails often included comments designed to signal and
encourage a special relationship, such as “you never stop inspiring me,” “the only reason I am okay with this semester ending is because I get to teach you again next semester,” “you are one of my favorite people,” and “you are a truly inspiring person—and one of the reasons I am looking forward to getting back to school.” Additionally, Morrone used inappropriate language with students in these emails, in one instance calling a student “bitch,” in another calling a student “sweets,” and frequently swearing.

Two witnesses reported that Morrone made comments on their hair, bodies, make up, or attire. Those reports were corroborated by other witnesses who observed him making these comments.

(d) **One-on-One Conversations Encouraged Emotional Dependency on Morrone and Furthered a Sense of Intimacy with Him**

Witnesses reported that their interactions with Morrone developed in intensity through time spent alone with him. We find that Morrone intentionally sought to spend this one-on-one time with students in order to strengthen an inappropriate connection to them. Several witnesses reported spending time with Morrone after class, and some recalled being asked or pressured to do so; one reported that in those after-class sessions, Morrone would tell her highly personal details about his own life and ask her “not to tell anyone.” Several noted that the door to Morrone’s classroom would be closed or the blinds drawn during these conversations. In other instances, Morrone would bring up topics from the students’ journals, and several reported that he would encourage them during these private meetings to write more about personal topics.

It is important to note that even within what many witnesses described as a warm and caring school environment where many teachers fostered good teacher-student relationships, Morrone’s conduct was unlike that of other teachers. Witnesses shared that faculty generally
took precautions to meet students in public places and/or leave the doors and blinds of a classroom open.

(e) **Morrone Made Physical Contact during Class and in One-on-One Meetings Feel Normal to Female Students**

Morrone also frequently initiated physical contact with his female students. Fourteen witnesses described some form of physical touching—and an additional four witnesses described him often standing or sitting uncomfortably close to them. More specifically, three witnesses reported Morrone pinching them, and others reported him touching them on the shoulders, arms, and lower back. Three remembered Morrone’s thigh pressing into their own as they sat side by side while discussing coursework, and one recalled him stroking her hand. Another, who had included her own sexual experiences in her free writes, recalled Morrone giving her a hug that she found sexually charged, and one student observed Morrone kissing another student on the top of her head in his classroom. This conduct was corroborated by multiple witnesses who described Morrone’s physical touching of female students as ubiquitous or common, particularly among his favorite students.

(f) **Martial Arts Allowed Morrone to Have Prolonged and Inappropriate Physical Contact with Female Students**

In addition, Morrone frequently initiated physical contact with his female students in the context of providing martial arts instruction. Many female students reported inappropriate touching in their martial arts exploratory classes or in one-on-one sessions—two specifically recalled Morrone pinning them on the floor in a manner that was both sexual and threatening. Students from the classes of 2011 and 2014 recalled taking lessons in a padded room without windows—a fact that senior administrators confirmed. One witness reported feeling “very scared” in this environment during a one-on-one lesson.
Witnesses shared that he frequently demonstrated moves with female students and would touch them to move their bodies as part of that demonstration. Two female students recounted Morrone pressing the front of his body into their buttocks—once during a demonstration and once when preparing for class—and one of the students recalled feeling his genitals. Female witnesses also noted that Morrone personally encouraged them to take his class or sought them out for one-on-one lessons.

Twelve witnesses reported seeing Morrone teaching martial arts without his shirt on or being in a martial arts class where he was not wearing a shirt, adding to the sexual atmosphere some felt he created. Six other witnesses saw him shirtless on campus or during SA-sanctioned programs. Many of these witnesses noted that they saw him without a shirt outside and in plain sight, leading them to assume that the administration understood and approved of Morrone not wearing a shirt. While none of the faculty members that Debevoise interviewed reported seeing Morrone teaching students with his shirt off, we credit the students’ accounts, which were specific, numerous, and detailed.

(g) Babysitting and Car Rides Were Coveted Experiences for Female Students

Female students regularly babysat for Morrone’s children and were thus sometimes alone with him either in his home or in the car. Several students perceived invitations to babysit as both a reward for being one of his favored students and as a way in which Morrone intensified his interactions with students. While SA policies allowed babysitting for faculty members at the time, and many witnesses reported no discomfort with the situation, three recalled specific late-night awkward situations while babysitting in which they felt like Morrone was too close to them or seemed like he might kiss them.
In addition, Morrone was known to give female students rides home from school or babysitting, and these off-campus experiences heightened some students’ sense that Morrone was interested in them. Several witnesses also reported widespread speculation about the nature of Morrone’s relationships with the female students that he drove off campus. The fact that he sought out these one-on-one interactions off campus and at night lent credence to students’ perception that Morrone was having sexual relationships with students.

(h) *Morrone Abruptly Rejected Some Female Students, Leaving Them Distraught*

Through the course of their interactions with Morrone, many witnesses reported becoming emotionally dependent on Morrone, describing him as a “trusted confidante.” Once this dependence was established, however, some witnesses noted that his conduct would abruptly shift and he would distance himself from them. Seven witnesses specifically reported that Morrone withdrew his affections or attention from them, leaving them distressed and, at times, desperate to regain his attention. One witness said she felt like she was “going crazy” as a result; another described it as an “emotional breakup.” Some witnesses perceived that this occurred if they “rejected” Morrone by not enrolling in or withdrawing from his classes; they further noted he displayed aggression towards them as a result. Others felt his affection lapse if they stopped revealing deeply personal things to him in their journals, and would resort to personal revelation again in hopes of regaining his favor. At least one witness shared a concern that her grades would suffer if her personal revelations stopped; other students were clear that they believed Morrone gave them better grades due to their favored status.

One witness shared with us that she became so distressed when rejected by Morrone that she told him she was going to talk to the administration; in response he threatened her and told
her that no one would believe her. In the context of the other evidence, Debevoise credits this account of Morrone threatening a student.

Not all of Morrone’s favored students experienced this cooling period; the evidence shows that several favorites stayed in touch with him for years after graduation.

2. Sexual Interactions after Graduation

At least one former student reported that she had sexual interactions with Morrone after graduating from high school. Debevoise finds that he groomed her as a student for later sexual contact. We further conclude that Morrone stayed in touch with other former students to see whether or not sexual interactions were possible.

3. Aggression towards Students

In addition to the constellation of conduct described above, Morrone was frequently aggressive with male students, as well as with female students in the martial arts context. Morrone specifically invited students who were perceived as struggling with mental health issues, or had pent-up aggression, to practice with him, under the theory that martial arts might help them. However, students reflecting upon the martial arts program described it as mostly hitting and kicking each other without reference to any specific martial arts discipline. Debevoise learned that throughout the course of the martial arts program, Morrone gave one student a bloody nose, injured another student’s eye, and hit another in the head so hard that he threw up.

In addition and most seriously, in 2015 a student was severely concussed when Morrone kicked him in the head during martial arts class. The student—who fell to the ground after being kicked by Morrone—was neither wearing headgear nor protective padding at the time, and the class was being taught on concrete. An accident report after the concussion confirmed that
students were “using traditional 18oz boxing gloves but no headgear, as [Morrone] had observed that the students tended to hit harder and be rougher when wearing the head gear.” The report described the kick as a “high kick that was out in front of the student” – individuals who heard about this incident contemporaneously described it as a roundhouse or spinning back kick. The report did not include the account of either the injured student or the other students in the class at the time as to how the incident occurred.

Finally, many witnesses reported that Morrone was aggressive towards or expressed anger towards male students in his classroom. Witnesses reported that Morrone swore at and yelled at male students in front of their classmates and that his reactions to male students’ behavior was out of line with the students’ conduct. For example, one student reported that he was berated after asking Morrone about a deadline; another remembered Morrone swearing at him after he expressed a negative opinion about an assigned text.³

4. Code of Conduct

SA’s Staff Code of Conduct (the “Code”), which was in place by at least 2014, outlined appropriate behavior for all staff who interact with students. Morrone’s behavior, as reported by witnesses, violated the majority of the Code’s provisions. By favoring female students, Morrone failed to “[t]reat students fairly regardless of sex . . . or physical appearance.” His displays of aggression toward male students also involved swearing, “harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate students,” and demonstrated a lack of respect for his students.

Morrone’s free writing exercise enabled him to “have secrets of a personal nature with students,” and students could have perceived his comments as being sexual or about their

³ Some male witnesses further reported that Morrone seemed to treat them less favorably in the classroom. Administrators also received complaints that Morrone favored female students as early as 2005.
“physique or body development.” Likewise, by emailing with students in a flirtatious and 
personal manner, he did not “[r]efrain from any electronic communication with students other 
than discussions related solely to academic or school-related activities.” Furthermore, his use of 
sexual materials in the classroom and his recommendation of explicit texts as well as his own 
manuscript constituted the provision of “sexually oriented materials,” which the Code prohibited.

In his one-on-one conversations with students, he did not “[r]efrain from discussing [his] 
personal problems with students” and he certainly did not “[h]ave the classroom blinds up, door 
open, or move to an area that can be easily observed by others” when engaging in these 
interactions. Rather than “avoid[ing] physical affection of any sort or that can be 
misinterpreted,” Morrone seems to have sought out such contact. In particular, the Code used 
 “[t]ouching knees or legs” as an example of an “[i]nappropriate display[] of affection.”

Morrone also consistently failed to “[a]dhere to the standards of a professional 
relationship relative to the developmental stage of the student.” His behaviors, including giving 
certain students his own sexually explicit writings, were particularly confusing to his teenage 
female students, many of whom reported having crushes on him at the time or believing that he 
was attracted to them.

In addition to providing the Code in writing to its employees each year, in recent years, 
SA also regularly provided training to the faculty and staff on these rules and the importance of 
maintaining appropriate boundaries with students.

5. **Statements by Morrone**

Morrone refused to speak with Debevoise for this investigation, but was interviewed by 
the Oppenheimer Group in 2020. Debevoise had access to those materials. In his Oppenheimer 
Group interviews, Morrone denied making any physical contact with students outside of 
pinching one student and hugging students in public celebratory situations, such as after they
gave their senior speeches. He explicitly stated that he has never touched a student’s hair, leg, thigh, or face. He further denied calling students by pet names, calling a student a “bitch,” or recommending *Lolita* to more than one student.

Morrone stated that, while he had close relationships with many students, they were appropriate and he maintained boundaries. He further denied knowing, until recently, that there was a perception that he developed close relationships with female students. He maintained that he treated male and female students the same. In discussing one student, Morrone claimed to have treated her like any other student, and attributed her confusion about their relationship to her mental health. His account of the report in 2007 also varied in notable ways from that of other witnesses and documentary evidence.

Morrone acknowledged that he drove babysitters in his car. He acknowledged his free writing practice, and said two to three times a year he talked to a school counselor about information he learned in the exercise. He denied ever reading pages that students turned over. Morrone also explained that he conducted one-on-one martial arts classes with students, some of whom had anger management issues. He recalled working with 30 students privately during his time at the school, and claimed that these lessons started with male students. He said less than half of his martial arts students were girls, and later identified 12 female participants in his one-on-one sessions.

While Morrone acknowledged that one female student had gotten a bloody nose during martial arts class, he denied any other uncomfortable moments with female students in his martial arts courses and also denied doing one-on-one sparring with female students in a room with the door closed.
He said he did not make a habit out of maintaining connections with students after graduation, with the exception of one former student.

Both documents and witness statements establish that Morrone was aware of—and admitted to—inauspicious interactions with students prior to his meeting with the Oppenheimer Group. Based on the number of detailed and consistent reports that Debevoise received from witnesses that Morrone engaged in inappropriate boundary crossing, many of which were corroborated by witnesses to whom the victims disclosed the events at the time, we do not credit a number of Morrone’s statements to the Oppenheimer Group.

6. Awareness of Morrone’s Misconduct by the SA Administration

The vast majority of witnesses never reported their interactions with Morrone to any adult at SA. In many cases, witnesses told us that this was because Morrone’s behavior was so obvious that they assumed it was known and at least tacitly sanctioned. Administrators and fellow teachers were aware, for example, of Morrone’s free writing practice, and two teachers told us that they saw risk in the open-ended nature of that practice. Students also recalled comments made by faculty members indicating their clear awareness of Morrone’s boundary-crossing behaviors.

Multiple witnesses did not approach the SA counseling staff with concerns about Morrone because they believed both SA counselors, at one point or another, provided counseling to Morrone. Some witnesses reported speaking to Flora Field, a former SA counselor, about Morrone. Field initially spoke with us, but then refused to answer follow-up questions regarding her conversations with SA students once investigators received appropriate student consent.

Importantly, many students did not report Morrone’s conduct because they enjoyed the special relationship that they felt they had with him and craved additional attention from him. A
number of witnesses reported that, in retrospect, Morrone preyed on them at a particularly vulnerable point in their lives; and several described the factors that led them to feel vulnerable at that time. Because of their free writing and one-on-one conversations, Morrone was aware of these vulnerabilities, and he used them to build students’ reliance on him; making many students less likely to report his conduct.

Witnesses also described SA as an informal environment in which boundaries between teachers and students were often blurry. In particular, witnesses noted that classrooms had couches, students used first names with faculty, and students were encouraged to share their feelings in “sharing circles” led by faculty and staff. While many members of the SA community noted that close teacher-student relationships were a hallmark of the SA experience, others emphasized that extra care needed to be taken to maintain appropriate boundaries in that context. As a result, some witnesses only recognized after graduating that Morrone’s behaviors were inappropriate.

Nevertheless, the evidence shows that four students and/or their parents approached the administration with concerns about Morrone crossing boundaries with them. These witnesses uniformly reported that their concerns were dismissed. In some instances, administrators made the students feel as if they were to blame for Morrone’s conduct. An additional two students approached the administration having heard concerns about Morrone’s relationships with others. We have detailed those direct reports, as well as other evidence as to what the administration knew, below. While the evidence shows that administrators were in close communication, wherever possible we have indicated specific evidence as to the knowledge of Durgin and Dwight.
Outside of direct reports, from students or parents, we were also struck by the number of adults at SA who told investigators they would often see Morrone spending time alone with female students. Some of these adults believed he was mentoring these female students, but now realize that his conduct was inappropriate. We also found evidence that a student made a report to a faculty member around 2007 to the effect that Morrone was “creepy.” There is conflicting evidence regarding whether that teacher reported the student’s comment to anyone else. We note that, while non-specific, “creepy” is the term often used by minors to describe adults who have made them uncomfortable sexually.

(a) Prior to October 2007

The evidence shows that as early as 2004, members of the administration, including Durgin, understood that Morrone favored female students and formed close relationships with them. In response to reports regarding this favoritism, Durgin spoke with Morrone in 2005 or 2006 and asked him to “do whatever you need to counter the impression.” In her interview with Debevoise, Durgin noted that Morrone did not appear to “reflect deeply” on this advice.

In addition, before 2006, at least one parent repeatedly approached Durgin to express concern about Morrone assigning Lolita to her daughter. The fact of this complaint was corroborated by multiple witnesses. The evidence shows that Durgin spoke with Morrone at the time, informing him that he could no longer recommend Lolita to his female students.

In early 2007, the SA administration learned that a female student felt that Morrone had crossed boundaries with her and was harassing her. Morrone discussed these allegations with senior SA administrators, including Durgin. He also showed them her free writing, in which she had talked bluntly about her perception that Morrone was flirting with her. Little was done to investigate the veracity of her account at the time, and administrators attributed the student’s
allegations to her mental health. There is no evidence that anyone further reviewed her free writing to Morrone. The administration’s primary response was to try to separate her from Morrone.

In the fall of 2007, a second female student approached the administration, reporting that Morrone had pinched her and made inappropriate sexual comments to her. Although Durgin did not speak directly with the student about her experience, documents make clear that numerous SA administrators—including Durgin—were fully aware of her account, including allegations of “sexual” comments and the pinches. One employee advised another at the time, “Even with [Morrone’s] history and ‘reputation’, we cannot take the word of a student over a faculty member.” The same employee noted that Morrone “is one of our most valued teachers and we don’t want to lose him, nor do we want him to risk bringing himself down by discounting the gossip and direct accusations being made.”

Durgin was forwarded this employee’s comments, but did not respond. The documentary record reflects that she counseled another employee to “tell [the student] that in no way is it appropriate for her to have a conversation with [Morrone] about . . . ‘sexual undertones.’”

The evidence shows that SA contacted outside counsel to determine the appropriate response. SA relied on advice of counsel and did not terminate Morrone’s employment. Counsel did, however, recommend the filing of a mandated report under CANRA and SA failed to do so.

As noted, senior administrators required Morrone to attend training with a human resources consultant at this time. Despite an initial recommendation of a full day of training, Morrone only met for 2.5 hours with the consultant. The consultant also recommended ongoing monitoring, and disclosed to Durgin that Morrone “readily admitted that he engaged in
inappropriate behavior toward students and expressed both shame and remorse for having had ‘an adverse influence on kids.’” Durgin stated that no such monitoring ever took place, nor were students’ free writing journals ever reviewed to determine whether or not they contained inappropriate content.

(b)  

*October 2007 through August 2012*

After Morrone’s training, several years passed without anyone reporting his misconduct to SA administrators. Specifically, there is no evidence that any reports were made at any time between 2008 and 2011. Notwithstanding Durgin’s recent statements to investigators that she did not follow the consultant’s recommendation to monitor Morrone’s conduct, documentary evidence suggests that Durgin made at least one inquiry in 2008 in response to a specific rumor regarding Morrone’s conduct, suggesting her ongoing potential awareness of issues regarding his relationships with female students.

(c)  

*August 2012 Letter and Meeting*

In 2012, Durgin received a letter, which she forwarded to Dwight, detailing concerns about Morrone’s inappropriate boundary-crossing behavior. The letter specifically named six alumnae with whom the letter writer believed that Morrone had crossed appropriate boundaries. The letter also noted that there were “other girls” who had expressed “their rage and distress at Marco’s treatment of them,” and stated pointedly that SA students had “watched [the school] tolerate Marco’s poor boundaries for years.” The letter said that alumni regularly described Morrone as “pervie” and warned that he was a liability to SA. Neither Durgin nor Dwight took any action in response—they took no steps to learn additional information, did not contact counsel, nor did they discuss the information with the Board. Durgin told Debevoise that she did not take any action because the six individuals named had all graduated before October 2007,
when Morrone attended the required training, and that the letter therefore did not contain anything “new.” Dwight did not recollect receiving the letter.

Around this same time, the student who had raised the 2007 complaint that led to Morrone’s required counseling met with Durgin to share her concerns about Morrone’s ongoing employment at SA. As with the 2012 letter, Durgin did not perceive this as providing her with any new, actionable information.  

(d) August 2012 through February 2018

There is no evidence of any reports to the SA administration regarding Morrone’s boundary-crossing behaviors between 2012 and 2018. However, one witness relayed credible information that Dwight was told a specific rumor in 2013 about Morrone having a sexual relationship with a student. That same witness reported that Dwight questioned the student about whether this was the case, and that student denied any such interaction. This set of facts was corroborated, in part, by two other witnesses. The evidence further demonstrates that Dwight specifically asked another student about Morrone’s interactions with female students. Thus, while no students complained about Morrone’s conduct during this period, the evidence shows that there were continuing rumors about his interactions with certain students.

(e) 2018 Report regarding Free Writing

In 2018, a parent approached Dwight and expressed serious concerns about her son’s interactions with Morrone. In particular, this parent recalled that Morrone built a confidential relationship with her son through free writing exercises, and then rejected him after he became emotionally dependent upon Morrone. The parent highlighted Morrone’s behavior and its

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4 Certain public reports suggest this meeting took place in 2016. Documents, however, make clear that it was 2012. This discrepancy, however, does not, in our view, affect the credibility of the 2007 Complainant, whose account is entirely corroborated by documents and witnesses’ statements, including statements made by Durgin.
connection to the free writing exercises. She asked Dwight to have Morrone stop the practice of free writing with her son. No action was taken—or apparently even considered—in response. It is possible that because this complaint related to a male student that the administration did not perceive the similarities between this conduct and Morrone’s earlier boundary crossing with female students.

(f) Conversations among Administrators about Morrone’s Free Writing Assignment

In April 2019, one of SA’s peer schools published the results of an investigation into sexual misconduct, which included information about a teacher who had built emotionally close relationships with students through writing exercises. This prompted the SA administrators, including Durgin, to discuss their concerns that Morrone’s free writing process could lead to a blurring of teacher-student boundaries and could create liability for the school. During this discussion, Dwight expressed her support for the exercise: “I have loved watching our students journal and journal and journal down here as part of their work for him.” There is no evidence, however, that Dwight actively monitored the content of the journals submitted by students, outside of a handful of instances where concerning content was proactively brought to her attention.

Current and former SA faculty also reported being aware over time that Morrone’s free writing exercise led to students disclosing alcohol use as well as emotional and mental health concerns. Despite this internal awareness, no steps were ever taken to monitor students’ free writing or otherwise direct Morrone to stop the practice.

(g) July 2019 and February 2020 Reports

In the summer of 2019, Durgin received a report that Morrone had been inappropriate with female students, including those who had graduated after 2007. This report was given not
by an alleged victim, but by someone speaking on their behalf (the “2019 Reporter”). In response, Durgin immediately contacted outside counsel as well as a few members of the Board. She spoke with the 2019 Reporter shortly after he contacted her, and reached back out to him on more than one occasion to encourage the impacted students to come forward, but none were willing to. Ultimately, after discussions between administrators and advisors, Durgin determined that an investigation would not take place.

In February 2020, Dwight received an email from another alumnus who alleged that Morrone had engaged in sexual misconduct with female students at SA. Durgin and Dwight spoke with this alumnus after his email. As in 2019, they told the alumnus that they needed to hear directly from impacted students.

(h) **Awareness of Violence in the Martial Arts Program**

When a student suffered a severe concussion when Morrone kicked him in the head, the evidence shows that SA administrators and staff did not interview witnesses to the incident, but rather credited Morrone’s account—which blamed the student for the injury—without further investigation. Morrone’s version of events was incorporated into SA’s “Student Accident Report,” which explained: “They were about 3 minutes into the activity when Marco determined that the student was hitting quite aggressively, something common for high school students, and to calm things down, he put up a high kick that was out in front of the student.” The report explained that the student “step[ped] in towards Marco as he executed the kick,” which “caus[ed] Marco to kick [the student] in the jaw.” The evidence demonstrated that no further inquiry was made into what might justify a teacher kicking a student in the head.
Furthermore, Morrone was allowed to continue teaching martial arts, without suspension or any verification of his credentials. Witnesses reported a continued level of physical contact in the course.

(i) Concerns regarding Morrone’s Relationships with Colleagues

While it is outside the direct scope of this investigation, we note that SA administrators frequently heard reports of and directly observed Morrone’s bullying behavior towards different SA colleagues. In 2019, Morrone was required to receive coaching for these behaviors. In addition, many witnesses reported an understanding that Morrone was having a sexual relationship with a co-worker of which the administration, faculty, and students were aware. This relationship was further substantiated by documentary evidence. More specifically, some students credibly reported seeing Morrone and this colleague in what had appeared to be a sexual interaction, in a car near campus.

Morrone’s pattern of behavior clearly violated SA’s Code of Conduct, feeding many witnesses’ perceptions that the SA administration was unwilling to take action against him. Multiple witnesses—alumni, former faculty, current and former staff, and trustees—shared with Debevoise their frustration and confusion that Morrone’s employment had not been previously terminated, given the number and variety of complaints about his conduct. Durgin may have struggled to discipline Morrone because their relationship, as reflected in documentary evidence, was strained and antagonistic. In particular, Durgin explained to the investigators that Morrone’s popularity in the SA community and his role as a voice willing to stand up to the administration

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5 Some of these bullying incidents were similar to aggression Morrone displayed towards male students. In other instances, Morrone was more physical. For example, Morrone backed one colleague against a wall, causing him to feel threatened. Morrone was also disrespectful to another male colleague on many occasions, including in one instance dragging his crotch over the seated faculty member’s head before a meeting.
made it particularly difficult for her to take more serious action against him without concrete evidence of wrongdoing. The evidence also showed that Durgin believed she was creating a record with which her potential successor could terminate Morrone’s employment.

Durgin and Dwight both voluntarily met with Debevoise investigators. It is clear that both Durgin and Dwight have dedicated themselves fully to building SA as an institution, and have been central to the school’s success. They both answered all of our questions; however, we do not credit all of their responses, some of which were contradicted by documentary evidence or credible statements by other witnesses.

7. **Tucker Foehl**

Tucker Foehl assumed the role of Head of School in July 2020. Shortly thereafter, in August 2020, Foehl was approached by three alumnae with allegations about Morrone’s alleged misconduct. The evidence shows that Foehl took immediate action—consulting outside counsel, hiring a third-party investigator, preventing Morrone from entering campus, and ultimately dismissing Morrone.

Additionally, as allegations of misconduct were brought to his attention during the investigation, he consulted with counsel and the SA Board as to appropriate next steps. While some witnesses reported frustration with the amount of information Foehl provided to the community and the speed of his responses, ultimately Foehl proceeded according to the advice of counsel and took steps toward greater transparency and in support of a more comprehensive investigation.

Debevoise found Foehl to be forthcoming and fully cooperative with our investigation.

8. **Awareness of Morrone’s Conduct by the SA Board of Trustees**
The SA Board of Trustees did not have an awareness of the breadth of the allegations against Morrone. Durgin shared with some Board members one of the 2007 incidents, but she did not provide the context of the prior complaints regarding Morrone’s boundary crossing. Likewise, she told a few Board members about further allegations against Morrone in 2019; however, these incidents were raised in informal discussions and Durgin failed to provide sufficient context about the earlier complaints against Morrone, including the 2012 letter listing the names of additional alumnae who may have had information about Morrone’s misconduct. Reports to the Board regarding Morrone were generally confined to his difficulty with his colleagues, which the Board considered to be outside of its purview.

Debevoise concludes that the better practice would have been for Durgin to have provided the Board Chair and Executive Committee with the full context she had regarding Morrone’s misconduct, including the fact that there had been other complaints regarding Morrone’s behavior prior to the incident in 2007 that led to the required counseling and the 2012 letter with additional names of students potentially affected by Morrone’s boundary crossing, and to be more transparent about steps taken, or not taken, to address those allegations.

The evidence demonstrates that the Board was informed in 2020 at a high level about the findings of the Oppenheimer Group. SA and the Board were advised by legal counsel and decided not to disclose that Morrone was leaving due to misconduct. The better course would have been to initiate a broader inquiry at that time, and to ascertain what misconduct the school administration had been aware of prior to 2020.

9. Conclusions Concerning Morrone

Based on interviews with alumni, parents, faculty, staff, trustees, and others with relevant information, as well as a review of available documentary evidence, the investigators conclude
that Morrone engaged in inappropriate boundary crossing with at least 34 students between the classes of 2005 and 2021 while he was employed by SA.

We further conclude that Morrone’s conduct violated the SA Code of Conduct in multiple ways, including: having sexually oriented materials and sexually related conversations in the presence of students, having secrets of a personal nature with students, discussing an individual student’s physique, discussing personal problems with students, engaging in electronic communication with students of a personal nature, not meeting in a public location when meeting one-on-one with a student, not keeping classroom blinds and doors open when meeting one-on-one with students, swearing, using harsh language that may frighten, threaten or humiliate students, and touching of knees or legs.

Debevoise also concludes that the members of the SA administration, including Durgin and Dwight, knew or should have known that Morrone’s inappropriate conduct continued after 2007, but took inadequate steps to monitor and investigate. Those failures led to a culture where students believed Morrone’s behavior was sanctioned. Additionally, Debevoise concludes that SA administrators showed a pattern of dismissing students’ concerns, at least in some circumstances implicitly blaming them for the uncomfortable interactions they reported, and often accepting Morrone’s version of events without any challenge. It would have been a better course of action for the responsible adults to have, at a minimum, asked more open-ended questions of the students, and to proactively inquire as to issues beyond whether Morrone had initiated sexual contact upon hearing rumors about his misconduct. Additionally, had the school implemented continued monitoring, as recommended in 2007, the severity of Morrone’s conduct might have come to light sooner.
VI. Sexual Abuse by Other Adults

Because SA invited people to come forward with information about any adults, investigators learned of three instances of past sexual abuse by two separate adults associated with SA. The first adult, Shannon Rake, was an assistant coach for the girls’ soccer team at SA during the Fall of 2002 and the Fall of 2003. Debevoise concludes that she sexually abused one SA student on multiple occasions, and SA terminated her employment after Janet Durgin and the then-head coach of the girls’ soccer team learned of Rake’s sexual abuse. The second adult, Adrian Belic, taught a short course on documentary filmmaking in January 2004, and did not return to the school after that course ended. Debevoise concludes that he sexually abused one SA student on multiple occasions and sexually abused a second SA student on one occasion.

In both cases, the adults formed relationships with the students through their employment at SA. The adults took advantage of those connections to begin spending time alone with the students outside of SA activities. Witnesses reported that the adults’ employment at SA allowed them to initiate this alone time with the students and groom them for later sexual conduct. These students were minors at the time of the abuse, and they were unable to consent under California law.

Debevoise credits the accounts of the three students who were sexually abused, and their accounts were corroborated by witnesses who knew of the sexual abuse at the time. Debevoise attempted to contact both Rake and Belic but received no response from either individual.6

A. Sexual Abuse by Shannon Rake

Shannon Rake was an assistant coach for the girls’ soccer team at SA for two seasons – the Fall of 2002 and the Fall of 2003. During this time, she formed a close relationship with one

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6 SA did not have records related to the employment of Rake or of Belic, and the school did not systematically retain emails from this period.
of the female students on the team, and used her position as the student’s coach to groom her for later sexual abuse. The two began to spend time together outside of soccer practice and team events, and their interactions turned sexual while Rake was still coaching the student. The student’s parent learned of Rake’s sexual abuse and reported it to Janet Durgin and the then-head coach of the girls’ soccer team during the 2003-04 school year. The witness also reported writing about her sexual interactions with Rake in her freewriting for Morrone’s class.

Upon learning of the misconduct, Rake’s contract with the school was terminated. However, Durgin and the then-head coach did not speak to the student about the abuse—even to offer support to the student—nor did they make inquiries into whether this employee had abused other students. SA simply terminated its relationship with the employee. Rake’s sexual abuse of this student continued after Rake was terminated from SA.

Several witnesses independently recalled this series of events and were aware at the time that the administration was informed of the abuse. Debevoise did not credit the accounts of Durgin and the then-head coach of the girl’s soccer team, both of whom recalled meeting with the student’s parent, but presented varying and illogical explanations of the parent’s concerns and the reasons that Rake left the school.

Debevoise did not find evidence that anyone at SA filed a mandated report about Rake at the time, as would be required by the State of California in the case of potential sexual or physical abuse of a minor under CANRA, or that any SA employee contacted law enforcement at the time. There is also no evidence that anyone from SA contacted outside counsel or the Board when Durgin and the then-head coach learned of Rake’s sexual abuse.7

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7 The current Head of School, Tucker Foehl, learned of the alumna’s allegations regarding Rake in April 2021, and that the alumna requested confidentiality. Foehl consulted with legal counsel and, at that time, no report was made to law enforcement.
B. Sexual Abuse by Adrian Belic

Adrian Belic is a documentary filmmaker who first came to SA after Ellie Dwight invited him to present his work at a school assembly. Following this assembly, Belic returned to SA to teach a documentary filmmaking course in January 2004 during SA’s intersession, a period when students take an immersive class or travel with a school group. After speaking with multiple witnesses and reviewing corroborating documents, Debevoise concludes that Belic sexually abused two girls while they were students at SA.

Debevoise received credible reports that, after teaching the intersession course at SA, Belic began spending time alone with a female student from the class. At first, the student considered him to be a mentor and they saw several movies together in addition to exchanging emails and speaking on the phone. Belic used this one-on-one contact to groom and manipulate the student for later sexual interactions. Belic sexually abused the female student on multiple occasions after the intersession course and before the student graduated from SA, including one instance of sexual intercourse to which the student was unable to consent. Debevoise also concludes that Belic sexually abused a second SA student on one occasion, during the same period as his abuse of the first student.

Debevoise found evidence Marco Morrone may have learned concerning information about the student’s relationship with Belic while she was still a student at SA. The student wrote about spending time with Belic in her free writes for Morrone’s class. The student’s parent also recalled asking Morrone about Belic, including whether or not the school did a background check on Belic, and expressing concerns about the amount of time Belic was spending with the parent’s daughter. Based on that information and other evidence, we believe Morrone was aware of this situation.
Dwight told investigators that she recalled one of the school counselors telling her that there might be an issue with Belic and the first student. She also heard that Belic was sexually inappropriate with the student. Dwight did not follow up on this information. A number of years later, Dwight attempted to contact the student about Belic, having told Durgin she would do so, but did not hear back from the student. Durgin had no recollection of this outreach.

Debevoise has not been able to confirm that anyone at SA filed a mandated report about Belic, or that any SA employee contacted law enforcement. There is also no evidence that anyone from SA contacted outside counsel or the Board with respect to Belic’s sexual abuse when the students were enrolled at SA. Debevoise attempted to contact Belic but received no response.8

C. Conclusions Concerning Sexual Abuse by Belic and Rake

The evidence shows that two adults once associated with SA engaged in sexual abuse of students who were minors. At least some members of the SA administration or faculty knew about and failed to report this conduct under CANRA. As a result of this investigation the school has notified both adults’ subsequent employers to the extent they later worked with minors and those employers still exist.

VII. Other Concerning Misconduct

Witnesses also reported three other situations that merit mention.

First, investigators learned that an SA employee made a series of inappropriate remarks to students. While more disciplinary action could have been taken, SA administrators

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8 Foehl contacted the first student abused by Belic as part of the 2020 investigation into Morrone’s misconduct by the Oppenheimer Group. The alumna told Foehl that she did not want to participate in the investigation. She also told Foehl that an intersession teacher had engaged in misconduct with her while she was a student at SA. Foehl understood the relationship to be sexual based on the comments, but did not have Belic’s name at the time. Foehl consulted legal counsel, and, at that time, no report was made to law enforcement.
appropriately documented this behavior and issued a formal warning to this employee. We will follow up with the school to ensure that appropriate monitoring is put in place for such conduct going forward.

Second, investigators learned that a temporary independent contractor was physically aggressive with a female student on one occasion. SA continued to hire this individual after the student reported feeling violated, and the school’s inaction in this regard caused emotional distress to the student involved. The school will review its protocols to make sure that it consistently implements any decisions not to have a contractor rehired or on campus.

Finally, while outside the scope of the Debevoise investigation, we also heard of instances in which mandated reports under CANRA were not made or were significantly delayed in response to credible allegations of student-on-student sexual assault. Specifically, a student reported to a member of the SA administration that she was sexually assaulted by another student while on a school-sponsored overnight trip. Several senior SA administrators, including Dwight and Durgin, were aware of this student’s allegations, but no mandated report was made until more than three months later, when a third party advised SA that such a report was required. Another student raised potential allegations of assault by the same student; her allegations did not prompt any discussion of the need for a report to be made. In order to protect the privacy of the individuals involved, we have chosen to limit the details shared about these allegations.

VIII. Recommendations for Policies and Procedures

Debevoise reviewed SA’s current policies designed to prevent boundary crossing and sexual misconduct by adults at SA as well as its protocols for reporting misconduct internally and, where appropriate, to outside authorities, including the 2021-22 Employee Guide and the current Faculty Handbook. The investigators found that SA is following best practices in these areas, and is dedicated to implementing and enforcing policies that protect its students. In
particular, the school has made significant efforts to strengthen its policies and training over the past two years.

SA made a number of changes to its policies in response to the Oppenheimer Group’s 2020 investigation into Morrone’s misconduct. These new measures, such as prohibiting employees from being alone in a car with a student in non-emergency situations and from asking a current SA student to babysit for the employee, reflect SA’s commitment to reducing situations that put students at risk. SA has also prominently posted the faculty Code of Conduct on its website in several places, including on a dedicated “Community Wellness” page, where community members are able to report violations of the policy to the Head of School, the Chair of the Board, or through LiveSafe, a reporting platform that allows for anonymous reports.

Notwithstanding the now quite strong student safety measures reflected in SA’s current policies, Debevoise makes the following further recommendations:

- **Record Retention**
  - SA should conduct an audit of its record retention protocols to ensure that it is maintaining a centralized personnel management system that records any instances of discipline or complaints against adults at SA by colleagues, students, or other community members.
  - The centralized record keeping system should contain records for staff and faculty as well as any contractors or temporary employees who interact with students.
  - SA’s document retention policy should include an exemption for complaints regarding adult/student sexual misconduct or boundary crossing.

- **Policies Regarding Student Safety and Boundaries with Faculty**
- SA should review its Code of Conduct and any other applicable safety and boundary policies in the Faculty Handbook or Employee Guide on a yearly basis to ensure these policies reflect best practices. This review should be performed with the assistance of legal counsel and be informed by a review of peer schools’ policies. SA’s policies should be updated immediately if SA learns of any misconduct that may not be covered by the policies.

- SA should continue to make its most current Code of Conduct available to SA community members. It should also reiterate, early and often, the availability and whereabouts of the alternative ways to report misconduct that it has implemented, including LiveSafe, as well as its commitment to not permit retaliation for making a report.

**Hiring of Staff, Faculty, and Contractors**

- Before hiring a new employee, SA should contact each of the individual’s listed references. It should document its findings from these reference checks. Documentation of reference checks for employees who are hired should be maintained in a confidential file for each employee kept separate from the employee’s personnel file.

- SA should ensure that staff and faculty who hire employees are trained on the above protocol.

- SA should also implement a central approval system for hiring contractors and temporary employees, so that such individuals are not rehired if they were previously dismissed for misconduct.

**Training of Staff, Faculty, and Contractors**
When hiring contractors and temporary employees, SA should ensure that it trains those individuals on the school’s anti-harassment and child-safety policies. SA should obtain a signed acknowledgement of this training from each person.

SA currently requires its employees to sign a document acknowledging that they agree to comply with the SA Employee Handbook and Code of Conduct. To the extent they are not already, the acknowledgement should be signed annually and the signed documents should be retained in each employee’s personnel file.

**Mandatory Reporting**

- SA has strengthened its training on mandatory reporting since the incidents reported in this document. However, Debevoise will follow up with SA to ensure that employees are aware of their mandatory obligations under CANRA.

- As part of SA’s mandatory reporting procedure, the Head of School should be made aware of any mandatory report that is made known to SA.

- If an adult at the school is known to be the subject of a mandatory report, that fact will be noted in a confidential file for the employee kept separate from the employee’s personnel file, protecting the identity of the mandated reporter as required by law.

- SA should also maintain a central, permanent record of all known mandated reports.

**Board Governance**

- The Board should form a subcommittee focused on student safety. This subcommittee should oversee the annual review of policies recommended above. It should also receive an annual report from the Head about any student safety
complaints, from all of the available complaint avenues, including anonymous reports, from the prior year.

- The Board should conduct an annual review of the Head of School’s performance, including an assessment of his or her enforcement of child safety protocols. The review should involve a collection and review of feedback from faculty, staff and administrators, whether through a 360 review or other process. There should be an opportunity for community members to submit anonymous feedback to the Board about the Head of School during the process.

- During its review, the Board should also inquire about any instances of misconduct regarding adults at the school and how those reports were handled. These reviews should be documented, and the results should be included in the Head of School’s personnel file.

IX. Conclusion

There is no doubt based on the volume of evidence and high number of people who spoke to us that Marco Morrone initiated relationships with teenage girls that crossed appropriate teacher-student boundaries. This was dangerous and harmful behavior, as was recounted to us credibly by numerous women who in some cases took years to fully understand what had happened and how the conduct had impacted their adult relationships.

We believe that Morrone cultivated these inappropriate relationships for his own purposes notwithstanding the fact that he did not engage in full sexual physical relationships with students. We note, however, that the documentary record clearly supports the notion that he pursued close relationships with certain of these women into their adulthood, including inviting
them to meet in person and emailing about personal topics. We further learned that Morrone had sexual interactions with at least one woman after she finished high school.

It is also our view that the students who were “selected” as favorites by Morrone were often particularly vulnerable. These students were prone to thinking of Morrone as a trusted mentor or caring adult and to being deeply impacted after realizing that he was manipulating them and taking advantage of their vulnerabilities.

We note that some witnesses we spoke with questioned whether alumnae’s complaints stemmed from a reevaluation of norms around appropriate teacher-student boundaries following the “Me Too” movement. Our answer to that is no. Morrone used his position of power to cultivate sexually charged and emotional relationships with young women who were not always equipped to understand the inappropriateness and severity of his conduct. This behavior has never been appropriate, as the student who complained in 2007 recognized. We feel confident that SA administrators, including Durgin and Dwight, would have appreciated the dangerous nature of Morrone’s conduct had they inquired and gained a better contemporaneous understanding of the full facts.

The close community of SA is one of its great strengths and many students talked about important formative and informal relationships with faculty members that have profoundly improved their lives. Morrone took advantage of that otherwise quite positive and supportive culture and we hope that these findings assist adults in understanding and recognizing the potential for dangerous teacher-student relationships that stop short of sexual interactions. We hope that the SA community can be a model going forward for how schools should recognize and handle these sorts of situations. SA’s attention to strengthening its policies and improvements to its procedures for violations of those policies already reflects that commitment.
SA has cooperated throughout this process. In addition, SA has instituted a therapy fund for those impacted negatively by either Morrone or other adults associated with SA. SA has also created several means by which students, parents, employees, and community members may report misconduct, including anonymously through a third-party reporting platform.

With regard to Shannon Rake and Adrian Belic, the two former employees who had sexual interactions with underage students, administrators could or should have asked more questions about time that was spent alone with adults associated with the school. Given that, in both cases, the abuse continued after the employees were terminated, SA should have provided support to these students at the time the abuse was discovered. The improvement of policies and procedures governing the ability of adults to spend time alone with students, a process that had already begun when we were hired, should be continued and be evaluated in light of these factual findings.

Debevoise has endeavored to present the information obtained during the investigation in as forthright a manner as possible, based on the information that the investigators were able to garner, while respecting the privacy and protecting the identities of the survivors and others with whom the investigators spoke.

This report concludes Debevoise’s investigation, but the investigators remain available should anyone wish to come forward with additional information.