Vaccines Could Accelerate Reopening Process

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With students returning to campus, many faculty members at SHP have received a COVID-19 vaccine for both their safety and their students'. There are lots of questions bouncing around campus concerning the effectiveness or safety of the different types of vaccines and whether the fact that teachers or students are receiving them will accelerate the return to normalcy at school.

We have currently reached Phase 1B, Tier 1 of the vaccine distribution process where teachers, but not students, are able to receive the vaccine. AP Physics teacher Mr. Riaz Abdulla says that "rapid distribution while continuing the four pillars that we emphasize at the school will help" in the journey back to traditional schooling. Furthermore, AP Environmental Science teacher Mr. Mike Judge explains, "We should think of the vaccine as another tool in our toolkit for getting back together at school and keeping everyone safe and healthy" in addition to "mask wearing, hand washing, social distancing, and other hygiene practices." In terms of the effectiveness of the distribution process itself, Mr. Judge is "impressed" with the rollout despite "a challenging logistical setup and subsequent confusion over where and when vaccines may be available. Folks have done their best to get vaccines to people as quickly as possible despite this challenging setup."

Many teachers have already opted in to taking the vaccine. In fact, Head of the Science Department Ms. Diane Sweeney stated that "six of [the science teachers] got it right when they [were available]," including Mr. Abdulla, who has since "received both doses of the Pfizer vaccine." Mr. Abdulla further advises that "barring any legitimate health concerns, all faculty members should take the vaccine." Similarly, Mr. Judge comments that his motivation for receiving the vaccine is primarily "to protect both those who cannot receive it as well as our broader communities." In other words, not only does receiving the vaccine help the recipient, it also helps those around them.

Another benefit of receiving the vaccine is that it can help you feel less worried. Ms. Sweeney says that "even though we should still wear a mask in public, there's less fear now in social situations." Ms. Sweeney has studied what amino acids have been changed in the receptor binding domain of the spike protein of the virus variants. "In human trials, the vaccines all still provide protection from serious disease from the current variants of the virus," says Ms. Sweeney. She assures that she is "very comfortable with [their] safety— the vaccine is the doorway to being normal again" and those who are able should take it. Overall, teachers are taking advantage of their opportunity to receive the vaccine and strongly encourage others to do the same.

Students are not yet able to receive the vaccine, but when the time comes, they should consider it. Ms. Sweeney recommends for teens that "if you have a choice, consider getting the J&J vaccine because it has less reactogenicity. The younger you are, the worse the mRNA vaccine feels in terms of side effects. The exposure to the spike protein [in J&J] is a little longer, and less abrupt." Plus, "it's one and done," unlike the Pfizer vaccine which requires two doses. As the community begins to return to campus, it is important to continue practicing the safety measures in place while students have not yet received the vaccine. Ms. Sweeney states that "the school is doing a really good job with safety," and everyone wants to keep the school a healthy environment. The further we progress through the different phases of the vaccine distribution process, the likelier it is that campus will gradually return to a pre-pandemic setting.