

SHP's Eligible Voters Consider Mail-in Voting

News - Eric Bollar '22

As Election Day draws near, SHP seniors and faculty are deciding how they are going to vote. Voters have the option to go to the polls or to send their ballot through the mail, and during quarantine, the popularity of the latter has increased drastically. Many individuals at SHP will be using mail-in voting to continue participating in the democratic process in a safe way.

The minimum voting age of 18 years old makes it so that seniors are primarily the only student group to be able to participate in the process. Even so, a large portion of seniors are still under 18. A recent survey sent to the Class of 2021 in which a little less than a third of the grade responded demonstrated that only 27.3% of the seniors met the age requirement. However, all of those eligible are planning on voting this year, a reflection of SHP's effort to increase involvement and knowledge about the voting process.

With regards to the method that will be used to vote, there was barely a discrepancy between students planning to vote in-person versus through mail. Of the 15 surveyed students who are eligible to vote, 8 of them will be voting through mail as opposed to the polls. Given the small sample size, the popularity of voting by mail is on par with voting in person.

Aside from these statistics, students seem to not only trust the mail-in vote, but find it to be a necessary alternative to voting in person. Katie Sandhu '21 states that voting by mail has

"been proven to be a safe and convenient way to exercise your right to vote, especially this year with the pandemic." Ava Borchers '21 agrees, saying that "mail-in voting is a really great and safe alternative to in person voting... if someone [wants] to avoid the risks of in-person voting." The risk of going to the polls during the time of the coronavirus makes mail-in voting a favorable alternative.

The primary issue that the two find with voting by mail is the topic of uncounted votes. Despite these fears, Katie notes that "in the 2016 general election, only 1% of absentee ballots were not counted, mostly due to issues with signatures. If you follow the ballot instructions and mail your vote early, you can feel secure that your vote will be counted." While Ava also finds discrepancies with signatures on mail-in votes to be an issue, she brings up another possible problem of "states [being] very strict on their prerequisites for mail-in voting and absentee voting, which can make it difficult for people who cannot get off work, elderly people, and immunocompromised people to vote." The effects of the coronavirus make mail-in vote a necessity to some, which students say outweighs the negative effects of possible uncounted votes. Overall, the seniors at SHP who are eligible to vote find the mail-in vote to be a safer option in preventing the spread of Covid-19, but many are willing to vote in-person as well.

The faculty members at SHP are also fond

of the mail-in vote and consider it necessary for those who are unable to go to the polls to vote, even before the quarantine. Ms. Serene Williams, who teaches AP Comparative Government, spoke about the importance of "political efficacy," the notion that "if [someone] participates in a political system, they will make a difference." As a result, she votes during every election cycle. However, she talked about the difficulties of being a working mother and how she is always teaching on Election Day, so "the last several years [she has] voted through mail." In fact, she is registered as a "permanent absentee voter" in order to always receive the ballot by mail. According to Ms. Williams, mail-in voting is a convenient alternative for those with busy schedules who are unable to go to the polls.

Despite the increase in mail-in voting, the polls are still open. While Ms. Williams herself is unable to work at the polls, many SHP students and alumni will be. In her 12 years as a teacher at SHP, Ms. Williams has seen a "huge increase in civic engagement" from students at SHP, and "a lot of [her] students will be working at the voter centers this year."

For both the seniors and faculty members at SHP, the mail-in vote is a viable and popular alternative to voting at the polls, especially with the current impact of Covid-19, and allows students to become involved in the democratic process in a safe manner.