



COVID-19 Communication and Support:

a collaboration and co-creation document to address COVID-19-specific racism and xenophobia

Purpose: Create support structures and protocols for school and district communities

Roles to Consider: district leadership, district boards, site leadership, teachers, and students

The San Diego County Office of Education's Equity Department is committed to cultivating educational equity to ensure each and every student has access to quality learning experiences and the necessary [support](#) to engage in powerful learning opportunities. We strive to create safe and inclusive spaces for our students. A synthesis of the current information indicates [three distance learning equity needs](#) to address: (1) meet students' basic needs; (2) ensure equitable access to learning resources; and (3) proactively design responsive, restorative structures.

Our Current State

This past month, schools across the country and around the world have closed to reduce the spread of coronavirus—and educators have focused our efforts on ensuring that our students and colleagues are safe and healthy. While this crisis reminds us that our safety, health, well-being are deeply interdependent, it also accentuates the immediate need to confront [coronavirus-related racism and xenophobic messages](#) rapidly spreading online.

Hate, like any virus, spreads. Since the first report of COVID-19 in the U.S., [Asian Americans](#) have experienced a surge of [hate incidents and xenophobic targeting](#) as the first reported cases of the coronavirus were in China. Hate groups, media personalities, and elected officials have recently used racist scapegoating language (e.g., "Chinese Virus," "Wuhan Virus" and "Kung Flu") to spread fear, bias, and blame.

The History of Blame

Anti-Asian sentiment in the U.S. dates back to the late 1800s, when Chinese immigrant workers arrived to fill jobs in agricultural jobs, garment factories, gold mines, and railroad construction. In response to the new immigrants, an anti-immigrant racist narrative, "[yellow peril](#)," spread the fear that Chinese people would bring disease to American society.

This racist trope is among the first in a long legacy of oppression of Asians and [Asian Americans](#) in the U.S. For example the [Page Act of 1975](#) restricted East Asian women from immigrating to



the U.S. Likewise, the [Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882](#) banned most Chinese people from immigrating to the U.S. The remnants of these laws remain in public discourse today.

Health pandemics that have originated in areas that are populated by People of Color (POC) are highly scrutinized (e.g., SARS or Ebola). Likewise, the COVID-19 pandemic has been racialized, and Asian Americans, Jewish Americans, immigrants, and other communities are being blamed.

Responses to Bias and Xenophobia

Parallel to teaching the historical context and the skillset to discern when something is biased, we need to explicitly teach both educators and students how to respond when we hear or see xenophobic or racist comments. The Southern Poverty Law Center’s [Teaching Tolerance](#) initiative recommends a [four-step process for speaking up against bias](#): (1) interrupt; (2) question; (3) educate; and (4) echo. This [framework provides an approach](#) to intervene to address the immediate needs of our Asian students and team members who have been harmed by this type of hate rhetoric and anti-Asian or xenophobic commentary.

Interrupt	Question	Educate	Echo
<p>Interrupting means taking a time out. It shows the person you’re talking, texting or chatting with that what they’ve said is important enough to pause your conversation to address—that you need to talk about the racism before you talk about anything else.</p>	<p>We’re all familiar with “questions” that are really warnings: What did you just say to me? or Are you really going to do that? But in this context, the goal of questioning really is to better understand why the person said what they did.</p>	<p>The key to educating is to continue the conversation. The goal here isn’t to just provide facts about the topic generally to the person you’re talking to with, but to explain why what they’ve said needs rethinking.</p> <p>That means that, to educate folks around racism associated with the coronavirus, we need to understand not only the virus but also the racism.</p>	<p>It takes an effort to speak up against racist ideas and language. This is particularly true of people who are targeted by that language. That’s why we need to have each other’s backs. When someone else speaks up, echo them. Thank them, and emphasize or amplify their message any way you can. This not only encourages more speaking up—it also ensures that no one thinks your silence in response to biased ideas or language means you’re OK with it.</p>

Phrases to Interrupt Bias and Xenophobia	Questions to Ask to Combat Bias and Xenophobia	Historical Information on Discrimination	Anti-bias and Anti-discrimination Echo Language
<p>“Hang on. I want to go back to what you called the virus.”</p> <p>“Just a second—let’s get into your point that the virus is somebody’s fault.”</p> <p>“Before we talk about that, I want to talk about the language you just used.”</p>	<p>“Why did you call it the ‘Chinese Coronavirus?’”</p> <p>“Why do you think that?”</p> <p>“Where did you get that information?”</p> <p><i>One note: Asking someone to explain why a racist joke is funny is a great way to stop them from making racist jokes to you again. But if you want to have a real discussion about what they’ve said, it might work better to ask something like, “What made you say that?”</i></p>	<p>We might explain that it’s actually not common anymore to name a disease after its place of origin, and there’s a long, bad history of associating diseases with specific groups of people and that the name <u>COVID-19 was chosen</u> very carefully to avoid repeating those mistakes.</p> <p>If someone doesn’t understand why a comment they made was racist, <u>you can educate them</u> about the <u>long history</u> of stereotyping immigrants—and <u>Asian people, specifically</u>—as people who bring disease. You can explain how this stereotype is <u>both wrong</u> and harmful.</p> <p>And if someone tries to play down racist phrases as “just a joke,” you can <u>educate them</u> about the <u>discrimination and racism</u> many AAPI folks are <u>facing right now</u>, so they better understand the impact of their words.</p>	<p>While echoing is harder while we’re social distancing, there are many ways to do it. Online, we can re-share antiracist messages. in chats or conversations, we can respond to offer support and agreement.</p>

Source: [Tolerance.org](https://www.tolerance.org/)



Partnerships to Interrupt Bias

Throughout this past month, we have heard the refrain repeated, “We are all in this together.” This sentiment is at the core of equity work. The SDCOE Equity Department partners with local and national organizations to address bias and xenophobia. The [Continuous Improvement Process \(CIP\) Equity Model](#) supports the improvement of educational equity in schools by engaging participants in a process that both strengthens their understanding of the complexities of equity and helps them develop a continuous improvement habit of mind with the goal of implementing sustainable system change for all students. As part of this statewide work, we partner with the [National Equity Project](#) and the [National Center for Urban School Transformation \(NCUST\)](#).

Likewise, local partnerships include the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) [No Place for Hate](#) initiative, a K-12, student-led program to support schools to create more inclusive and sustainable change. Participating schools incorporate the ADL’s anti-bias and [anti-bullying resources](#) into their existing programs. Additionally, middle and high schools send teams of students and adults to the [No Place for Hate Leadership Conference](#). The ADL also provides expertise and resources to address [COVID-19-specific](#) bias and xenophobia.

SDCOE Proactive Recommendations

In the coming weeks, we will likely have more questions than answers. As we adapt to this new reality, we will each need to make an effort to take care of one another. We will possibly need to make some sacrifices to ensure that our communities stay as safe and healthy as possible. All students are negatively impacted by hate and bias. It is our responsibility to protect our students and [provide tools to our educators](#). Now is the time to speak up against bigotry, particularly if you’re not the target.

- Ensure that all of your spaces are welcoming, safe, and hate-free
- Engage in professional learning
- Leverage literacy: students need to be able to identify credible sources and engage in current and historical contexts of racist history
- Lean into our SDCOE Equity Department for support

If we all commit to interrupting, questioning, educating, and echoing to fight racist rhetoric, we can start making our communities safer and healthier today.



Curation of News Articles:

Wall Street Journal, April 13:

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/schools-closed-for-coronavirus-online-work-wont-count-11584643049>

USA Today, March 28:

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/03/28/coronavirus-racism-asian-americans-report-fear-harassment-violence/2903745001/>

NBC, March

26:<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/asian-americans-report-nearly-500-racist-acts-over-last-week-n1169821>

Newsweek, March 25:

<https://www.newsweek.com/school-closures-coronavirus-inequality-education-gap-widens-1494303>

Anti-Defamation League (ADL) March 24:

<https://www.adl.org/blog/coronavirus-highlights-and-perpetuates-inequities-in-our-society>

New York Times, March 23:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/us/chinese-coronavirus-racist-attacks.html>

National Education Association (NEA) Today, March 23:

<http://neatoday.org/2020/03/23/educators-take-a-stand-against-coronavirus-racism/?fbclid=IwAR0Lh9ArdiCszCYw-Cs52Rnnt35NI3GsYqYjMHYftrs7KEvPPfArqXu96ck>

American Progress, March 19:

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/news/2020/03/19/481962/coronavirus-pandemic-racial-wealth-gap/>

Los Angeles Daily News, March 18:

<https://www.dailynews.com/2020/03/18/during-coronavirus-school-closures-distance-learning-may-only-exacerbate-academic-inequities/>



The Philadelphia Inquirer, March 18:

<https://www.inquirer.com/health/coronavirus/coronavirus-closed-schools-inequity-technology-laptop-philadelphia-new-jersey-20200318.html>

Time, March 18: <https://time.com/5805932/philadelphia-schools-teach-online-coronavirus/>

Forbes, March 17:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/colinseale/2020/03/17/distance-learning-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic-equity-and-access-questions-for-school-leaders/#521348111d4d>

New York Times, March 15:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/15/world/europe/coronavirus-inequality.html>

The Boston Globe, March 13:

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/03/13/nation/coronavirus-school-closings-expose-another-pandemic-american-inequity/>