



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

March 4, 2020

Dear Education Leader:

I write to request your careful attention to recent challenges that have been reported in light of the coronavirus (COVID-19). There has been an increasing number of news reports regarding stereotyping, harassment, and bullying directed at persons perceived to be of Chinese American or, more generally, Asian descent, including students. These reports are quite troubling and are of particular concern to Secretary Betsy DeVos and the Office for Civil Rights.

The Department appreciates that some institutions are taking prompt and forceful measures to protect the health and safety of students, instructors, and staff, consistent with guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Schools and educators should follow the recommendations in the [CDC guidance](#) and this Department's [Information and Resources for Schools and School Personnel](#), as these recommendations are the most effective precautions that can be taken to safeguard the health of our educational communities. In an environment of fear, however, some individuals may regrettably turn toward racial or ethnic stereotypes. Worse, ethnic harassment or bullying exacerbates hatred, harms students, and is never justified. These incidents can create a climate of misunderstanding and fear. This hurts all of us.

Educational institutions should take special care to ensure that all students are able to study and learn in an environment that is healthy, safe, and free from bias or discrimination.

Discrimination can take many forms, ranging from verbal abuse to physical attacks based on race, ancestry, or misunderstandings about cultural traditions. As education leaders working within our respective communities, we must ensure that harassment based on race or ethnicity is not tolerated.

The Department appreciates the efforts of educators who have reaffirmed their commitment to protecting all students from the harmful effects of bullying and harassment based on race and national origin. We also remind you that in some circumstances, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI) may require educational institutions to investigate bias incidents and take reasonable steps to end unlawful harassment, eliminate hostile environments, prevent the harassment from recurring, and, as appropriate, remedy its effects.

Through our own conduct, as well as through the language that we use to discuss this sensitive topic, we must demonstrate that health and tolerance are compatible values; they are both central elements of the educational excellence that our students deserve.

If you have questions or would like additional information or technical assistance, you may visit the website of the Department of Education's OCR at www.ed.gov/ocr or contact OCR at (800) 421-3481 (TDD: 800-877-8339) or at ocr@ed.gov. You may also contact OCR's Outreach, Prevention, Education and Non-discrimination (OPEN) Center at OPEN@ed.gov. For more information about your civil rights obligations, including the obligation to avoid discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin, please visit Ed.gov/OCR.

Thank you for your help in ensuring that our educational system is safe for all students.

Sincerely,

/S/

Kenneth L. Marcus

Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights