



# PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

prepared & empowered

March 2020

Dear Portland Public Schools families, staff and community members,

*I wrote to you recently about how we can all work to prevent the spread of Coronavirus 19 if there is an outbreak in our community. I am writing now to ask for everyone's help in combating another problem related to COVID-19: stereotyping, harassment, and bullying of students, staff or other community members perceived to be of Chinese American or Asian descent.*

*There have been an increasing number of reports nationwide of such unjustified and wrong behavior, according to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR). "These reports are quite troubling and are of particular concern," according to a recent OCR letter to educators.*

*COVID-19 was first identified during an outbreak in Wuhan, China, but now has been detected in at least 81 countries, including the United States. As of this writing, we have had NO reported cases of COVID-19 in Maine and the chance of an outbreak is quite low. Our school nurses and administrators are working closely with the public health department, the Maine Center for Disease Control (Maine CDC) and the Maine Department of Education to keep updated on the situation.*

*Still, as the OCR letter states, "In an environment of fear ... some individuals may regrettably turn toward racial or ethnic stereotypes." This bullying, harassment or discrimination can take many forms, ranging from verbal abuse to physical attacks based on race, ancestry, or misunderstandings about cultural traditions."*

*The Portland Public Schools is Maine's largest and most diverse school district. We are very proud of our diversity and consider it an asset to student learning. We do not tolerate harassment, bullying or discrimination against any of our students and staff, whatever the circumstance. Instead, our schools work to ensure a positive learning environment for all our students.*

*We also strive to safeguard the health of everyone in the Portland Public Schools community. Stereotyping, bullying and harassment create a climate of misunderstanding and fear. That is not healthy for any of us.*

*Please feel free to contact school nurses with any questions or concerns about COVID-19, and report any instances of harassment or discrimination to school administrators.*

*I will continue to update you on any local developments regarding the virus. In the meantime, stay home when sick, cover up coughs and sneezes, wash hands regularly – and please be tolerant of others. More information on COVID-19 can be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus>*

**Xavier Botana, Superintendent**

P424- ENG COVID-19 Letter