

## Spike in bullying reported at schools amid coronavirus fears

Bangor Daily News (Maine)

March 10, 2020 Tuesday

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**Length:** 413 words

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### Body

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As of 12 p.m. Wednesday, March 11, test results show that no Mainers have tested positive so far for the coronavirus. For the latest coronavirus news, [click here](#).

PORTLAND, Maine -- Portland Public Schools Superintendent Xavier Botana issued a letter to faculty and other school officials this week, warning that concerns over the spread of the new coronavirus, known as COVID-19, is leading to an increase in bullying and harassment in schools.

The superintendent's letter echoes a statement published last week by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, which said some are turning "toward racial or ethnic stereotypes" as fears of the virus spread globally.

In his letter, Botana called 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."

Botana did not cite any specific incidents in the school system. He said there is no programming currently planned in the district on the issue of bullying. Approximately 5.5 percent of students in the roughly 2,000-student district identify as Asian.

[Do you have questions about the coronavirus? [Ask us here](#).]

The respiratory pathogen was first identified during an outbreak in Wuhan, China, in late December and has since spread to 81 countries, including the United States. Concentrations of people who have tested positive for the virus are in California, New York City, and King County, Washington.

Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker declared a state of emergency there on Tuesday afternoon, after the number of people who tested positive in the state jumped from 51 to 92.

The coronavirus has not yet been confirmed in Maine as of Tuesday evening.

Superintendent Botana said the chance of an outbreak was "quite low" in the Portland school district, where school nurses and administrators are working with the public health department, Maine Center for Disease Control and state Department of Education to prevent outbreaks.

As with the common cold or influenza, COVID-19 spreads when an infected person coughs or exhales, emitting small droplets, according to the World Health Organization. People who have COVID-19 have shown flu-like

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symptoms, including fever, cough and shortness of breath. The infection might also spread before people show symptoms, according to the CDC.

Watch: What you need to know about handwashing during coronavirus

[bdnvideo id="2948276"]

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**Load-Date:** March 12, 2020

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