

JOINT STATEMENT TO DENOUNCE DISCRIMINATION AND XENOPHOBIA IN RESPONSE TO CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

The undersigned are community based organizations focused on serving and advocating for people of colour and other marginalized communities in Canada.

We support the recent statement from the York Region District School Board that the public should avoid discrimination and xenophobia during this recent outbreak of the coronavirus. <http://www.yrdsb.ca/schools/Repository/NewsEvents/Pages/Message-from-the-Board-Chair.aspx>

Parent groups in York Region started a petition calling on their school board to publicly expose families that have recently visited anywhere in China and to suggest that their children be prevented from attending school. It specifically referred to families returning from China during the Lunar New Year: <https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/stop-2019nCoV-spread-in-york-region-school>

Influenza and pneumonia are ranked among the top 10 leading causes of death in Canada. Each year in Canada, it is estimated that influenza causes approximately 12,200 hospitalizations and 3,500 deaths annually. No one has ever suggested that we should quarantine students for 17 days each time they have the flu.

The news is ever changing but what is known is that our health care system is much better prepared to respond to the latest coronavirus outbreak than in 2003 with Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS): <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/coronavirus-canada-toronto-update-1.5440853>. Health officials have already developed a test and are screening travellers before they are permitted to leave the airport.

The coronavirus is not isolated to people of one nationality or race. This is a world health issue that has its most serious impact in one area of China (Wuhan), but it has affected people of all different races. Some cases have been found in other parts of China and other parts of the world. East Asian Canadians were discriminated against during the SARS crisis despite the fact that the virus affected people of all races and nationalities. The discrimination against East Asians at that time did not make the public safer; instead it isolated people, entrenched stereotypes, led to increased bullying in schools and spread fear of people of East Asian heritage. It is vital that we learn from the lessons of 2003 and apply them in how we treat each other today.

Racism has no place in our society or in our classrooms.

We applaud York Region District School Board for its excellent message to focus on the evidence, show empathy and avoid racial profiling. We urge all School Boards and public officials to provide similar leadership to promote a calm and inclusive approach, and prevent racial profiling.

Endorsed by:

Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services
Alliance for Preserving the History of WWII in Asia
Black Legal Action Centre
Centre for Immigrant & Community Services
Chinese Canadian National Council for Social Justice
Chinese Canadian National Council – Toronto Chapter
Chinese & Southeast Asian Legal Clinic
Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change
Council of Agencies Serving South Asian
Mississauga Community Legal Services
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants
Parkdale Community Legal Services
Punjabi Community Health Services
Regional Diversity Roundtable of Peel (RDR)
South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario
Urban Alliance on Race Relations
Yeehong Centre for Geriatric Care