

As the Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, I am going to discuss our response to COVID-19 and remote teaching and learning through that lens.

Several issues including racism, classism, and oppression have come to light since this pandemic has hit. Not that these issues did not exist prior to COVID-19, but now they are top of mind, front and center. According to the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, there has been an increase in Xenophobia and harassment directed towards Chinese, Chinese Americans and other Asian groups. Our students are having to confront Microaggressions that some have never experienced before and when I talk about microaggressions, I'm talking about verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative prejudicial slights and insults toward any group, particularly culturally marginalized groups. You may have heard the term "China Virus" being used to describe the Coronavirus or phrases like "diseased Chinese people" or "go back to China". This in and of itself is offensive, hurtful and has caused social and emotional harm. Xenophobia is spreading just like this virus.

Another related issue that has emerged is that COVID-19 is disproportionately affecting the health of people of color which has implications for the wellbeing of our students, as this may be impacting their family members. According to the Brookings Brief, Blacks in about every state with racial data available have higher contraction rates and death rates. In Illinois, Blacks represent about 16% of the state but 30% of people diagnosed with COVID-19. In Chicago, [Blacks represent 70%](#) of people who have died from coronavirus. The underlying health disparities that are contributing to this higher incidence is a result of systemic racism.

This is also impacting our Latino community at disproportionately higher rates. Latinos across the US are disproportionately getting sick from coronavirus, in some regions being infected and hospitalized at up to three times the rate of white Americans. And the Latino communities that are worst hit by the crisis are among the least able to access the healthcare systems and unemployment benefits that could bring relief. This too is impacting our students, as they see loved ones getting sick and unable to access the help needed.

So what is the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy doing to assist our students with confronting these microaggressions and deal with the increased number of deaths that are impacting their communities.

We are having virtual Courageous Conversations! Utilizing Glenn Singleton's four agreements, Stay Engaged, Speak your Truth, Experience Discomfort and Expect and Accept non-closure, students are discussing the challenges of COVID-19 from racial, economic, and global perspectives.

The Asian Students in America Organization held an event called, I Am Not A Virus, in which they engaged in discussion on the progression of COVID-19. They examined the effects of the prejudice against those of Asian descent or perceived Asian descent internationally, nationally, and locally. Our Black Student Union, Indian Student Association, and Eastern European Student Organization have also held discussions specifically related to the impact of COVID-19 on their communities. Each of these discussions also has a component in which students talk about how to address related issues moving forward.

In addition, IMSA has posed a challenge to our students, How to disrupt systemic racism in Black and Latino Communities that have caused underlying factors such as health disparities and economic inequities, contributing to higher incidence of coronavirus in their communities? To be part of the challenge, students must attend a Virtual Courageous Conversation featuring a panel of STEM experts discussing the implications of COVID-19 from racial and economic perspectives. The panelists include an Epidemiologist, Professor of American Politics, Medical Students and President of a Non-Emergency transportation provider for the State of Illinois, two of which are IMSA alum. Students must identify the problem, provide evidence, and then develop an innovative idea that will address underlying inequities related to the negative implications of COVID-19 in the Black and Latino communities. How does this idea reflect upon, acknowledge, challenge and disrupt systemic racism, discrimination and oppression that have contributed to the "status quo"? Student can present their idea in the form of a Video/Animation, PowerPoint presentation or White Paper. A group of Health Professionals will judge the challenge, awarding cash prizes to the 7 most innovative ideas.

Being that the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy values a diverse community and is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive academic, social and work environment in which all members of the community are treated with respect and dignity and research, learning and scholarship can flourish, even in this time of remote teaching and learning, we are also having virtual sessions with students on how to confront microaggressions and stereotype management techniques. Art as Artillery : The Power of Hip Hop & Poetry" is a series that teaches students how to use their voice to disrupt systemic oppression. We have also instituted a bias incident on-line reporting system so that students can inform administration of any bias/hate incidents that have

experienced or witnessed. These initiatives have been implemented as directed by IMSA's Equity and Excellence Policy.

I encourage you to check the social-emotional wellbeing of your students during these challenging times and allow them opportunities to discuss and problem-solve.

Teaching Tolerance is a resource that will guide you to help your students speak up against bias. In their article, *How to Respond to Coronavirus Racism*, they recommend four steps:

1. Interrupt

- a. 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.

2. Question

- a. The goal of questioning really is to better understand why the person said what they did. You might ask: "Why did you call it the 'Chinese Coronavirus'?", "Why do you think that?", "Where did you get that information?"

3. Educate

- a. 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. That means that, to educate folks around racism associated with the coronavirus, we need to understand not only the virus but also the racism.
 - i. For example, you might explain that it's actually not common anymore to name a disease after its place of origin, that there's a long, bad history of associating diseases with specific groups of people and that the name COVID-19 was chosen very carefully to avoid repeating those mistakes.
 - ii. If someone doesn't understand why a comment they made was racist, you can educate them about the long history of stereotyping immigrants—and Asian people, specifically—as people who bring disease. You can explain how this stereotype is both wrong and harmful.
 - iii. And if someone tries to play down racist phrases as "just a joke," you can educate them about the discrimination and racism many Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

are facing right now, so they better understand the impact of their words.

4. Echo

- a. 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.
 - i. Of course, echoing is harder while we're social distancing, but there are many ways to do it. Online, we can re-share antiracist messages. And in chats or conversations, we can respond to offer support and agreement.

Another Article, *A Trauma-Informed Approach to Teaching Through Coronavirus*, states that it's also important to create a sense of safety, be sure to stay connected, promote a sense of hope and definitely check your own social-emotional health so that you can be your best self for your students.

Thanks and I will share these resources with you so that you can engage your students in healthy conversations around challenging topics!

1. IMSA's Equity and Excellence Policy
 - a. <https://go.boarddocs.com/il/imsa/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=AXVRK P68F803>
2. How to Respond to Coronavirus Racism
 - a. https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/how-to-respond-to-coronavirus-racism?utm_source=Teaching+Tolerance&utm_campaign=4ecffc4e9e-Newsletter+3-24-2020&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a8cea027c3-4ecffc4e9e-83167107
3. A Trauma-Informed Approach to Teaching Through Coronavirus
 - a. <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/a-trauma-informed-approach-to-teaching-through-coronavirus>
4. Brookings: Why are Blacks dying at higher rates from COVID-19?
 - a. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2020/04/09/why-are-blacks-dying-at-higher-rates-from-covid-19/?utm_campaign=Brookings%20Brief&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=86114926
5. The Guardian - The Virus Doesn't Discriminate but Governments Do: Latinos Disproportionately Hit By Coronavirus
 - a. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/apr/18/the-virus-doesnt-discriminate-but-governments-do-latinos-disproportionately-hit-by-coronavirus>
6. Teaching Through Coronavirus: What Educators Need Right Now
 - a. <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/teaching-through-coronavirus-what-educators-need-right-now>
7. When Xenophobia Spreads Like A Virus
 - a. <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/02/811363404/when-xenophobia-spreads-like-a-virus>
8. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
 - a. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>
9. UNICEF Voices of Youth
 - a. <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/campaign/take-action-and-help-fight-covid-19>

10. City of Chicago | Coronavirus Data
 - a. <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/covid-19/home/latest-data.html>

11. How Coronavirus Impacts Certain Races
 - a. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2020/04/22/how-coronavirus-impacts-certain-races-income-brackets-neighborhoods/3004136001/>

12. Hispanics see Coronavirus as threat to Health and Finances
 - a. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/03/24/hispanics-more-likely-than-americans-overall-to-see-coronavirus-as-a-major-threat-to-health-and-finances/>

13. Latino Policy Forum - Forum recommendations for the inclusion of Latino communities in COVID-19 relief efforts
 - a. <https://www.latinopolicyforum.org/blog/latino-policy-forum-recommendations-for-the-inclusion-of-latino-communities-in-government-and-philanthropic-covid-19-relief-efforts>

14. Black Americans will face more repercussions from COVID-19 than any other ethnic group
 - a. <https://www.blackenterprise.com/blacks-will-face-more-repercussions-from-covid-19-than-other-ethnic-groups-report/>

15. Chicago Urban League - Community Health Center
 - a. <https://chiul.org/2020/04/29/chicago-urban-league-launches-covid-19-community-help-center/>

16. Courageous Conversations about Race Protocol
 - a. <http://iel.org/sites/default/files/G10-courageous-conversation-protocol-overview.pdf>