The National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) and its members know well the upheaval and trauma the COVID-19 pandemic has caused worldwide. NAME also knows that it is abhorrent, counterproductive and racist for President Donald Trump to unapologetically call COVID-19 the “Chinese virus,” the “kung-flu” or the “Wuhan virus,” which is what some Trump administration officials also have labeled it.

The U.S. President continues injecting racism into a still evolving public health crisis. Such comments are never justified and have only served to fuel a spike in anti-Asian violence and prejudice in the U.S. and worldwide. Asked why he keeps calling the COVID-19 the “Chinese virus,” the Associated Press reported on March 18 that Trump didn’t consider it a racist remark, although public health officials and scientists say there is no basis for the link. Ethnicity is not a factor, and the pandemic, which now is in 189 countries and territories and six continents, clearly respects no borders. Trump added that the term was his response to Chinese officials suggesting that the U.S. military might have introduced the virus to Wuhan, China, where it first surfaced in late 2019. Also, by calling the worldwide struggle against the virus “a war,” labeling himself “a wartime president” “facing a foreign enemy” and making racist, white nationalist and xenophobic statements, Trump is trying to turn the nation’s ire on China, which is absolutely wrong.

Such disgusting outbursts might sound like a bully in a schoolyard yelling snit if the outcome of the virus spreading because of wrongheaded leadership weren’t so devastating. Nearly 340,000 people worldwide have contracted COVID-19, claiming more than 14,450 lives and counting. Italy on March 19 surpassed China in the number of people the pandemic has killed. The unprecedented health emergency has caused stock markets worldwide to tank; forced the closure of restaurants, bars, casinos, sporting events and other venues where people gather; companies have shut down; and hundreds of thousands of workers face layoffs. Schools, colleges and universities also have responded quickly to the public health emergency, emphasizing “social distancing” and mandatory “stay at home orders” to try to curb the spread of the virus.

NAME emphasizes that racism and inciting violence against Asians or any group should never be tolerated. Instead, government officials and business leaders urgently must focus on producing and distributing enough test kits, hospital masks, surgical gloves and breathing apparatus, such as ventilators, and creating more urban and rural hospital beds and intensive care units so that the world can be assured that people are getting the best possible treatment. As those with resources continue to hoard food and medical supplies, U.S. leadership continues to ignore what we could be doing instead: providing free high-quality health care access to the world’s populace.

As schools shift to distance learning and online education, officials must focus on providing affordable or free internet access for all in urban and rural areas so that children who have been unable to go to school can continue to get their lessons. Or they must find alternative methods to make lessons available to students. School districts and local leaders must also find a way to meet the food and nutritional needs of students and their families who qualify for free and reduced lunch programs. Efforts also should be directed to promoting “best practices” to make such distant learning is effortless for educators so that students don’t have to take a “gap year” because of COVID-19. For those people planning to start college this year, more virtual campus tours should be put in place and emphasized to attract prospective traditional and nontraditional students who currently are sheltering in place. State departments of education need to be working with educator preparation programs to ensure candidates do not incur costs or repercussions from not being able to complete field placements and licensure exams such as Praxis and edTPA. Test vendors and Pearson need to be working with educator preparation programs and testing centers to best serve future teachers who need not be burdened with this uncertainty.

NAME knows that a lot of unknowns remain about COVID-19. NAME hopes that in time, health specialists will uncover a treatment, ultimately a cure for the pandemic. But any such treatments must not parallel health care inequities across the globe, echoing racial and class-based disparities. During this global crisis, the U.S. should model health care for those who need it. Instead, the President and his administration foster division and racism while withholding health care. When will enough be enough?

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