

Feb. 1, 2021

To the Judges:

With the pandemic raging, the EdSource staff was, like journalists everywhere, frantically covering the news of how the pandemic was shutting down schools, affecting children's learning and challenging their teachers.

But we also knew that we had to dig deeper and tell the stories of how families were coping not just on one day in March but week after week and month after month. We wanted to stay with them and update for our readers just how the constantly-changing health crisis had upended their lives and disrupted learning for their children.

From that desire sprung a most unusual feature project entitled, "Education During Covid: California Families Struggle to Learn."

Nine EdSource reporters connected with 16 families from a Native American family in far Northern California to a military family in San Diego. Families from all walks of life, backgrounds and income. Nearly all had no choice but to do virtual learning. One boy in a rural corner of the state gave us a glimpse in the early days of the fall school year into hybrid learning.

Accompanying the series installments in September, November and December were videos capturing the pain, isolation, and hope of students from Pre-K through high school. The package also includes sidebars on how students who are seniors are managing this most unusual year and another piece on how a Los Angeles Unified middle school student literally fell through the learning cracks for the first six weeks of the school year.

As a finale, we produced a mini-doc entitled Education Interrupted to capture the pandemic's upheaval in education from Pre-K through college.

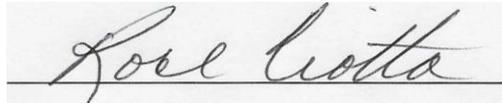
Taken in its entirety, this package offers a living history of how California managed a historic health crisis and details the challenges that lie ahead as families and children repeatedly described the inequities they were living with from inadequate technology to minimal facetime with teachers to missing what it was like to have a teacher, in person, explain a math problem or a concept in science.

As we rounded the fall and reached the end of the first semester, we deliberately asked our families (parents, guardians and students) to tell us what they were doing for fun and relaxation. What were they thinking about and talking about when they weren't doing virtual learning? What we heard was laced with a lot of hope, a reconciliation that they were going to get through this and they were engaging each other to bake or dance or take walks in the neighborhood whether that was the Yurok Tribal Land or the streets of San Jose.

This project involved many challenges starting with identifying a diverse group of families representing students of all ages from one end of California to the other willing to let us and multi-media into their lives. Videographer Jennifer Molina captures the scope of the work and the promise of the project in the three videos included in this entry.

As often happens in journalism, we only know about the beginning of this journey. We still don't know where this tragedy will take us. EdSource is committed to helping these families speak for others on the learning challenges created by Covid-19.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rose Ciotta". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background and is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

Rose Ciotta  
Investigations and Projects Editor