

## LOCAL

# With life upended by coronavirus, New Roots students apply pandemic to curriculum

**Matt Steecker** Ithaca Journal

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ITHACA -Through interviews, journals and photos, New Roots Charter School students have been documenting the COVID-19 crisis in Ithaca.

Ninth-graders and 10th-graders have been collaborating with the Tompkins County Center for History and Culture to record what has been occurring during the pandemic.

Avery Preston, a ninth-grader, is creating a collection of photos that show the empty stores and empty grocery store shelves.

“What I love most about this project is I’m able to reach outside my personal bubble to find the struggles and difficulties other people around me face,” Avery said. “It helped me discover that not everyone is fortunate to have a steady source of income to keep yourself and your family afloat.”

Avery's work is one contribution to a project in the humanities class led by New Roots teacher Danielle Angie.

“They’re very aware that they’re living through a pretty unusual time,” Angie said. “I tried to stress that they are part of history, and by doing this work, they are contributing to the historical record.”

Kelly Thomas, a ninth-grader in her class, spoke with a family member who was laid off.

“I like that this project focuses on the personal and financial issues of COVID-19,” Kelly said. “I think this will help people learn the negative impact COVID-19 has had on the economy.”

New Roots Charter School is a regional, tuition-free public high school founded in 2009. It is inside the historic downtown Clinton House.

About 150 students from 20 different districts attended the high school in 2018, according to past reporting from The Ithaca Journal.

New Roots 10th-grade students have made custom-made media and surveys for local nursing home residents. This project is assisting Mutual Aid Tompkins, a volunteer-run organization helping community members during the pandemic.

Seniors are using journal writing as a medium for capturing the historical moment.

In addition to documenting history, the pandemic also has been used to teach lessons in other subjects in the New Roots curriculum. Students have used math to chart the growth of the coronavirus, they have learned the science behind the virus, and have analyzed its effect on the economy and the global environment.

Lee Kaltman, who teaches Sustainable Entrepreneurship, asked his 12th-graders to create solutions for what he called the “new economy” and analyze whether the \$2 trillion Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed by Congress would help local businesses.

“Some really progressive ideas came out of that online discussion,” Kaltman said. “One student said, ‘Maybe we’re just going to have to lead a cleaner life.’”

Parents have been impressed with how New Roots has handled instruction during the coronavirus pandemic.

“The creativity that New Roots has set forth during this time has been well organized and implemented smoothly,” said Kim Fezza, whose child Toni is a 10th-grader. “The dedication to our students and their emotional and educational well-being takes my breath away.”

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