

# 'HIKI NO' DEBUT

*Students share their experience of the pandemic in a PBS series that begins tonight*

LOCAL / B2



**"HIKI NO" on PBS Hawai'i teaches elementary, middle and high school students how to create PBS-quality news features that reach a statewide audience on PBS Hawaii and a worldwide audience on [pbshawaii.org](http://pbshawaii.org). "This Changed Everything: HIKI NO in the Age of COVID — Part One" airs at 7:30 p.m. today. At right, the Kanada family on the Big Island bonds at home during the lockdown in a scene from the series.**



PBS HAWAII PHOTOS

# 'HIKI NO' documents pandemic through students' eyes

By **Esme M. Infante**  
einfante@staradvertiser.com

While educators, mental health experts and media have been trying mightily with varying success to understand and explain the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on the nation's youth, no one knows more intimately what's happened to students than the students themselves.

That's the premise of the new student-journalism TV series "This Changed Everything: HIKI NO in the Age of COVID," and the reason it's important viewing for parents, teachers, students and people of all ages, says Robert Pennybacker, vice president of learning initiatives at the public broadcast channel PBS Hawai'i.

The five-part weekly series, which tells the story of the pandemic as seen and experienced by Hawaii students, launches at

7:30 tonight on the PBS Hawai'i channel.

HIKI NO is a PBS Hawai'i initiative in which elementary, middle and high school students are taught to create broadcast-quality news features, which are shown to a statewide audience on the PBS Hawai'i TV channel and to a worldwide audience on pbshawaii.org.

Ninety public and private schools in Hawaii have HIKI NO-centered classes, clubs and/or student activities at their schools. And as the pandemic has forced people, businesses, schools, health care, government and other entities to endure myriad challenges and changes, HIKI NO students have kept running their cameras, asking questions and recording events and their personal experiences, even when they've had to do it from home.

After more than two years of coaching and broadcast students' pandemic

## ON TELEVISION

*"This Changed Everything: HIKI NO in the Age of COVID"*

- >> **What:** A five-part weekly series
- >> **When:** Launches 7:30 p.m. today on PBS Hawai'i channel

video projects, Pennybacker realized there could be value in pulling them together to weave a larger story.

"I felt it was kind of our duty to do this. No one else has this material," Pennybacker said.

"Although I knew that the concept for this series — a chronological look back at the first two years of the pandemic, through eyes of HIKI NO students — made sense on paper, watching the first episode makes me realize we have something pretty

special here," Pennybacker continued. "The past two years have been a blur for everyone and a time we'd just as soon forget. But seeing these 'I was there' reports from students, in chronological order, really makes one realize how far we've come."

The episodes are organized mostly chronologically and include about 75 student projects created by "hundreds of students," Pennybacker said.

Episode 1 takes viewers back to 2020, as students and teachers saw the COVID-19 pandemic begin to turn the world upside down, with emergency declarations, stay-at-home orders and fears of sickness and death.

The episode follows some HIKI NO students who were stranded in Washington, D.C., to compete in the Student Television Network convention, which was canceled at the last minute. Some students also

document life suddenly confined indoors, and how they took on more responsibilities to support their essential-worker parents, dealt with job loss in the family, learned to make and wear masks and other protective gear, and shifted to learning and socializing online.

Episode 2 looks at the class of 2020's unusual graduation season, and the first summer and subsequent school year fully in the pandemic, with its widespread virtual learning. Episode 3 picks up in early 2021 and examines how isolating longer than initially expected was affecting students' mental health.

Episode 4 looks at how students have built up coping strategies and resilience, Pennybacker said, "and Episode 5 brings us up to where we are now, with some conclusions."

For people who care about youth, or who are simply

trying to process how the pandemic has changed people and changed life, "I would say (watching) this is not just helpful — it's necessary, to get a perspective on what everyone went through," Pennybacker said.

He deflects credit for the series, bowing instead to writer/co-producer Colette Fox and editor/co-producer Brent Keane ("I had the idea. They did all the work!" Pennybacker says). The entire series is hosted from the PBS Hawai'i studio at Sand Island by Mina Suzuki, a HIKI NO journalist and senior at H.P. Baldwin High School on Maui. She introduces the students' news stories as "the first draft of history."

After tonight's Part 1 of the series, successive episodes will air at 7:30 p.m. each of the following four Tuesdays. All episodes also will be posted on the HIKI NO website, pbshawaii.org/programs/hiki-no.