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Parents, this is not the way to reduce Marin's inequalities



Janko Ferlic/Pexels

Marin parents are potentially about to make the county's inequalities even worse.

By **VICKI LARSON** | vlarson@marinij.com | Marin Independent Journal

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As the coronavirus pandemic keeps raging around us, I look for small blessings every day. There are many — I still have a job, I have food, a roof over my head, access to the beauty of Marin and, finally, enough toilet paper.

And, I don't have young kids. This is perhaps the biggest blessing. Because if my boys were school age, I just don't know what I would do. I wouldn't know how to work full time and oversee their distance learning once the lockdown forced schools to pivot online, or keep them occupied this summer before school — in [whatever form](#) — starts up again.

Opening schools is among the biggest debate right now, and parents and teachers are rightfully [concerned](#). We don't know if Marin's schools will be safe for anyone, including [teachers](#) and other school staff, even with the proposed [guidelines](#). But if we stay with online instruction, which Gov. Gavin Newsom has [mandated](#) for Marin for now, how will parents who are working manage? How far behind will children fall, especially those who don't have essential resources like internet access or the proper home conditions for studying and learning, or who have special needs? What about children's mental health if they don't go back to school?

Just as important, what about their parents' mental health?

We live in a country that touts family values but offers little support to families, which is why so many are really struggling right now, especially [moms](#). After months of overseeing [the bulk](#) of their children's virtual learning, while juggling everything else as either essential workers or at-home workers, mothers are at their [wit's end](#).

Some are just giving up. According to a new [study](#), “mothers with young children have reduced their work hours four to five times more than fathers. Consequently, the gender gap in work hours has grown by 20 to 50 percent.” This has lifelong financial ramifications for women.

Others are getting creative.

Schools are being [pressured](#) to open no matter what by Trump and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. This, [writes](#) sociologist Jessica Calarco, is “in effect, promoting a new form of school choice: If your child's school can't afford to open safely, you need to find one that can — probably a private or charter school — or keep your child at home.”

So a number of Marin parents are opting to create their own [“micro-pod”](#) to homeschool a small group of children with an educator paid for by the parents.



It's a great idea, actually, one that seems smart, doable and relatively safe. And, it will greatly exacerbate the divide between Marin's haves and have-nots — exactly at a time when we are experiencing an energized consciousness about systemic racism and Black Lives Matter.

Well-off families can afford to pay for a private teacher — .\$.700 a week per student, according to a Nextdoor post by a family considering a private outdoor school — for their micro-pod. Struggling families cannot. Which means lower-income parents will be forced to send their children to potentially unsafe schools — thus putting their family at risk — when they open, or continue with at-home learning, which has proven challenging. Marin has a [digital divide](#) — 21% of Black households in Marin City and 54% of Latinx households in the Canal District do not have high-speed internet, [according](#) to Marin Promise Partnership, and 11% of households in Marin City and 20% in the Canal don't even have a computer or digital device.

These are the kids who are going to fall behind. These are the kids who need a micro-pod.

What are the chances that the micro-pods being formed around Marin will be racially and socioeconomically diverse?

I can guess.

The pandemic is magnifying the inequities that already existed in our society, not only those persistent gender roles — c'mon guys! — but also in health care, income, and social and racial injustice. We've taken baby steps with the Black Lives Matter protests that have forced cities and towns across Marin, from [Mill Valley](#) to [Sausalito](#) to [Fairfax](#), to seek ways to promote racial equity in their community, and with the [merger](#) of Marin City's Bayside Martin Luther Jr. Academy and Willow Creek Academy, addressing decades of segregation.

So, this is our time, Marin. If you've been to the protests, if you've demanded your city council address racial inequalities, if you've taped a Black Lives Matter sign to your front window, now you have a chance to really put your beliefs into action. Open your micro-pods to our most disadvantaged children. Share the cost.

Either that, or Marin will continue to be the [most racially disparate county](#) in California and will continue and expand segregated education. And we'll have no one to blame but ourselves.

Vicki Larson's So It Goes runs every other week. Contact her at vlarson@marinij.com and follow her on Twitter at [OMG Chronicles](#)



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Vicki Larson | Lifestyles Editor

Vicki Larson is an author and has been an award-winning lifestyles editor, writer and columnist at the IJ since 2004. She has worked as an editor in Santa Rosa, Petaluma, Walnut Creek, San Francisco, Napa and Miami.

vlarson@marinij.com

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