

# The Moment a Veteran Teacher Decided to Pull His Own Kids from Public School

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## *Commentary*

On a spring night in 2022, Ross Hill was trying to get several of his children—he has eight—tucked into bed for the night.

He was having little luck. The oldest three in particular were struggling, and he felt helpless to fix what was troubling them.

“They were in tears because they didn’t want to go to school the next day,” said Mr. Hill, a 38-year-old teacher from Florence, South Carolina (pop: 39,958).

Whether he knew it at the time or not, Mr. Hill’s family was part of a trend in the United States. A surprising number of children are miserable at school, research shows, and it’s a trend that began before the pandemic.

For example, a 2020 Yale [study](#) that surveyed some 21,000 high school students across 50 states prior to the pandemic found that 75 percent of children had negative feelings toward school.

“It was higher than we expected,” co-author Zorana Ivcevic [told](#) Yale News at the time. “We know from talking to students that they are feeling tired, stressed, and bored, but were surprised by how overwhelming it was.”

The dissatisfaction grew worse during the pandemic.

As millions of children were forced to adopt performative non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) that left them feeling more isolated and less happy, the Associated Press [reported on](#) a mental health crisis in schools that was accompanied by a surge in youth suicides.

The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), which analyzed both pre- and post-pandemic data, discovered something even darker: a correlation between school attendance and youth suicide incidence.

“The findings of this study suggest that youth suicides are closely tied with in-person school attendance,” researchers of [the December 2022](#)

[study](#) concluded. “We show that suicides among 12-to-18-year-olds are highest during months of the school year and lowest during summer months.”

## An Opportunity

The idea that our school systems could be damaging to the mental health of children is an alarming prospect because, as researchers in several of these studies pointed out, children typically spend more than a quarter of their waking lives in school.

Perhaps just as alarming is the fact that many parents don’t have good options if their child is suffering.

Because of [compulsory schooling laws](#), parents can’t simply pull their child from school if he or she is struggling academically, getting bullied, or being subjected to a lousy curriculum. And while [school choice is expanding](#), many Americans can’t access these alternatives. This is why roughly 75 percent of all U.S. children are educated in their assigned district school, even though dissatisfaction with the education system is high.

Though a record number of American parents are embracing homeschooling—an option families in many countries don’t have—it’s a difficult leap for some families. Many parents work, and others might simply feel unequipped to school their kids at home.

This is a dilemma for countless families across America. But Ross Hill recognized it as an opportunity.

## The Tip of the Iceberg?

Many entrepreneurs will tell you the key to entrepreneurship is empathy.

In his book “[Wired to Care](#),” business strategist Dev Patnaik says empathy helps people identify opportunities by understanding what people want and need. This is precisely what successful entrepreneurs do, and it’s what Mr. Hill did.

Mr. Hill didn't feel like he had a lot of options when his children were miserable in the public school system. In fact, he said he felt trapped.

"Teachers feel trapped in the system too," he told me in an interview. "They are doing the best they can in a flawed system."

Then it occurred to him that if he felt this way, others must too, and most of these people lacked something he possessed: years of experience in education. That's when he realized he had something he could offer: a schooling service of his own.

Mr. Hill didn't come to this realization in a vacuum. He had watched [the microschool movement](#) explode across the country during and following the pandemic.

Microschools are independent learning institutions that operate outside of traditional school systems. Often described as "outsourced homeschooling," they tend to be less bureaucratic than traditional schools, which often emphasize standardized testing and fixed curricula. This makes microschools more agile, flexible, and adaptive, proponents say, allowing them to tailor education to students.

When Mr. Hill first learned about microschools he was intrigued. Then he became excited. He saw his skill set as a good match for what other "edupreneurs" were doing, and he began to explore the business model.

After months of research and prayer, as well as consultations with family and friends, he [decided to take the leap](#).

Last August, with the help of a \$10,000 private grant, he launched Mariner Learning Collaborative.

Mariner is not a school, Mr. Hill is quick to point out. Instead, it's a resource center for homeschooling parents that offers educational services to supplement the education parents do within the home.

"All of our students are registered as homeschoolers," Mr. Hill said. "It combines the best parts of homeschool and school."

Mr. Hill said enrollment is already approaching 20 children—including his oldest three, who are thriving in the new environment. He expects

the total number of students to continue to rise as the homeschooling trend continues to grow.

“This is just the tip of the iceberg of a whole wave that’s coming,” he said. “Microschools of all shapes and sizes are the future.”

## ‘In God’s Hands’

Like any entrepreneurial venture, there is of course a risk of failure, and this is something Mr. Hill accepts.

“We’ve put it in God’s hands,” he said.

Still, he believes the microschool model is sound and is likely to grow as more and more Americans flee a failing school system that has grown dysfunctional, bureaucratic, and sclerotic.

And he might be right.

A recent Gallup poll [found](#) that just 36 percent of Americans say they are satisfied with their school, a record low. It’s not difficult to see why.

It’s not just that math and reading scores [are at decade lows](#), even as school systems spend more than ever. Schools also continue to struggle with high levels of [violence](#) and [drug use](#), which is no doubt why [more than half](#) of all public schools now utilize armed police officers as security. And many school systems increasingly focus heavily on instilling in children [trendy values](#)—inclusivity, equity, diversity, and critical race theory—at the expense of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

All of these trends bode ill for the future of public education. But for early mover edupreneurs like Mr. Hill, they scream opportunity.

*Views expressed in this article are opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.*

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