



**"How Can I Stay In It
But Not Stay In it?"**

Leaving a Classroom But Starting a School

**Special report on teacher entrepreneurs
2022**

The Question

The former Teacher of the Year in her public school district said she had a crisis of conscience as she was on the verge of becoming a principal.

“I’d be going into a role where I would be leading the whole entire school to do something that I didn’t necessarily believe in. It just hit me one day. I can’t do this. But at that point I had too much time and money invested in my own education. It’s in my heart and in my blood.”

“And so I thought, ‘Well, how can I stay in it but not stay in it?’”

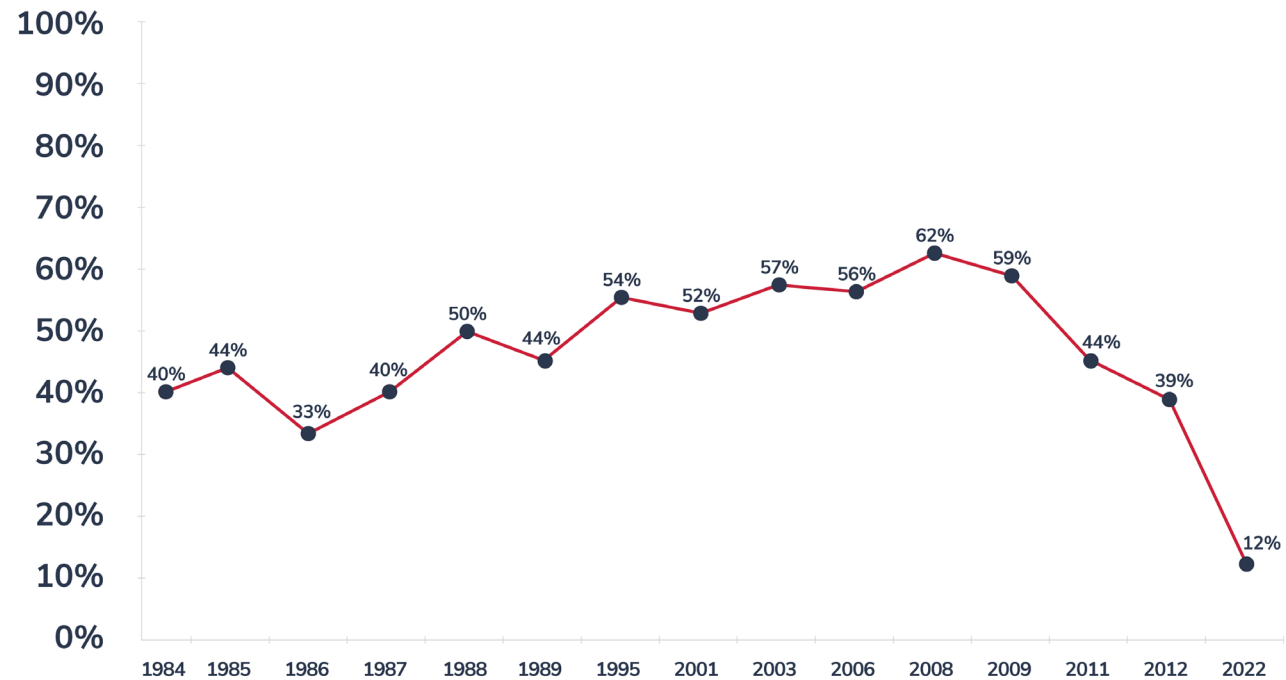


Let's start with the obvious:
**Public school teachers
are not happy with
their jobs.**



In fact:
**They've
never been
more
dissatisfied.**

Percentage of K-12 teachers who say they are 'very satisfied' with their jobs.



*The 2022 results are from the Merrimack College Teacher Survey.
The 1984-2012 results are from the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher.

But there is another way.

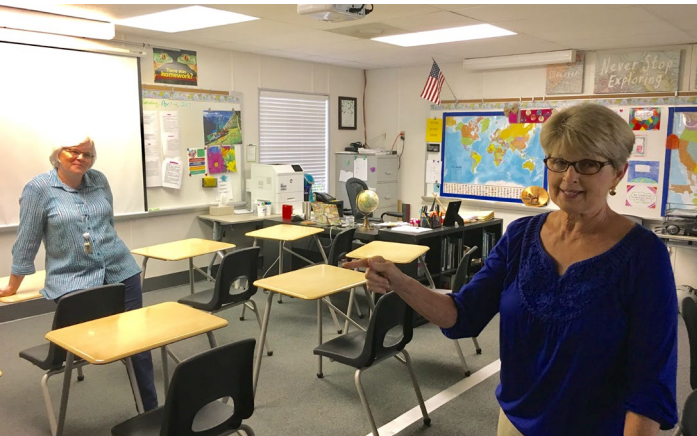


Increasingly, teachers can choose too.

- The growth of education choice is expanding options and opportunities not just for students and families, but for teachers.
- In choice-rich states like Florida, tens of thousands of teachers are now working in options outside of school districts that didn't exist a generation ago.
- *Even more compelling ...*



Teachers are creating their own schools.



- Former public school teachers in Florida are creating private schools, micro-schools & hybrid home schools.
- A big reason why? 70 percent of students in Florida are now eligible for school choice scholarships worth about \$7,700 each – and eligibility continues to grow.



We wanted to learn from this special group of entrepreneurs.

For a focus group, we interviewed 10 former public school teachers in Florida who became education entrepreneurs.

We wanted to learn:

- Why they left public schools?
 - What hurdles they faced creating their own models?
 - What potential solutions could minimize or eliminate those barriers?
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Who are these trailblazers?

Six are white. Three are Black.
One is Hispanic.

Seven represent urban areas.
Two represent rural counties. One
represents a suburban area.

Their experience as education
professionals ranges from seven
to 32 years, counting the time
since they created their own
learning options.

They spent between five and 19
years in K-12 education before
founding their own options, with
the average being 10 years.

Three founded large private
schools (serving 150 or more
students). Three founded small
private schools (serving between
50 and 100 students).

One each founded a private
micro-school (14 students), a
homeschool co-op (about 45
students), a hybrid homeschool
(about 30 students), and a
learning pod (with 5 to 10
students).

Four of the 10 created learning
options that wholly or primarily
serve students with special
needs.

Two of the pioneers are former
public school district Teachers of
the Year. One is former ESE
Teacher of the Year for the state
of Florida.

Two participants are recipients of
grants from the VELA Education
Fund, a national nonprofit that
supports everyday entrepreneurs
creating new learning models
such as micro-schools and
homeschool co-ops.

One participant won help from
The Drexel Fund, a philanthropy
that assists promising new
private schools sprout and scale,
and has been especially active in
Florida.



***Why did they
leave?***

***To help
disadvantaged
students.***

- “The initial desire for me was the lack of performance that I noticed, particularly among students of color. In my family, on my father’s side, for a long time I was the only male to graduate high school. And the only male that hasn’t been convicted of a felony. So, you see that relationship between a lack of education and a lot of those problems that are associated with being involved in the criminal justice system. Those types of experiences led me to want to make that change.”
- “There are kids who are absolutely gifted, but nobody sees them. You got all these kids that if given another way to show that they understand, they would be great. But because they’re not passing (the state’s standardized test) you’re putting them in this whole box like they can’t ever go anywhere or do anything. I decided they just need another option.”

***Why did they
leave?***

***To help their
own children.***

- “My son (who is autistic) was left soiled. My daughter was in the classroom and would tell the teacher, ‘Please, my brother needs a changing.’ It’s about an hour before class is dismissed, so guess what, not doing it. My son eloped (from school) three times My husband found him in a carport by himself. He was abused several times. He was not fed.”
- “My first taste of homeschooling was when I had some problems with my older son in eighth grade. I made the decision that his character is more important to me than academics, so I yanked him really fast out of school. His teachers were like, ‘No, no, no, what are you doing?’ I said it’s important for me to reel him in. And it was such a profound change in his whole personality that I knew when my youngest son got to seventh grade, I was going to pull him out, too.”

***Why did they
leave?***

***To help other
teachers.***

“You always had these people coming in, telling you how you’re supposed to work with these kids. I’m like, you need to talk to their teacher to figure this out. She’s got five kids in this room that didn’t sleep last night because they live in a house with four other families. But you want to come in, in five minutes, and say this teacher is ineffective. I hated that. So that’s what really motivated me. It wasn’t just for kids. It was for teachers, too. They needed something else, too. Where they could really be authentic and be creative and really reach the kids. Because they could. But not within the confines of the system.”

What barriers did they face?

How big a challenge was...	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	AVG
Earning a decent salary and benefits?	5	2	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4.7
Providing decent salary & benefits to employees?	5	2	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4.6
Finding seed money or start-up funds?	4	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	4.6
Finding an adequate facility?	4	2	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	4.5
Handling school-side paperwork (i.e., applications)?	2	2	2	5	3	5	5	5	3	2	3.4
Finding talented employees?	3	2	4	4	3	1	1	3	5	4	3.0
Handling business-side paperwork (i.e., payroll)?	3	3	2	1	5	5	5	2	1	1	2.8
Creating a business plan?	5	1	2	1	3	2	4	3	2	3	2.6
Marketing your school & recruiting students?	2	1	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1.4

Rated on 1-5 scale, with 5 being the most significant, 1 being least. P = participant.

We asked the focus group participants to rate common barriers on a 1-5 scale. These barriers stood out as the most significant:

- Start-up money.
- Ensuring adequate pay and benefits for themselves and their employees.
- Finding adequate, affordable facilities.

What wasn't much of a barrier? Demand.



Interestingly, most of the focus group participants said marketing their schools and recruiting students was *not* much of a challenge. Most said they did not advertise, because word-of-mouth alone has been sufficient to fill available seats.

- “We did not market, really, at all this year. We put nothing on Facebook, nothing on anything about enrollment, and I had over 200 people that applied.”
- “Initially, I planned to start with about 60 kids. That was my goal. But we ended up starting with over 200 kids during that first year.”

Solutions

Raise awareness.

- 70 percent of students in Florida are eligible for income-based scholarships worth about \$7,700 each.
- Public school educators by and large do not realize the entrepreneurial possibilities available to them with the expansion of school choice, even in states that are choice leaders.
- Choice advocates should work to better inform educators about the opportunities for educators



Solutions

Start networks.

- Establishing networks of trailblazers with similar backgrounds and goals can provide members with emotional and practical support; yield mentors and expert referrals; and inspire the next wave.
- The networks could also grow into something more formal, like an association of teacher entrepreneurs, that can systematically identify and mitigate barriers to entry.



Solutions

Tackle the facilities piece.

- There is a maddening hodgepodge of zoning and building codes for educational usage. A deeper dive could pinpoint more specific hurdles – and determine whether some of them can be appropriately eased.
- More awareness should also be raised about the potential use of churches, community centers, public libraries, private businesses, and code-ready modular buildings as facilities for micro-schools and hybrid home-schools.



Solutions

Expand education savings accounts.

- The flexibility of ESAs and their ability to help unbundle services and providers will open the door to even more innovative options beyond traditional schools.
- It can help fuel an endless variety of hybrid homeschools, homeschool co-ops, learning pods and micro schools.



Solutions

Better equip new teachers.

- Colleges of education should consider coursework that better prepares up-and-coming teachers for sustained success in a rapidly evolving public education environment that is increasingly choice-driven.
- That means not only having the tools necessary to work in different options across different sectors, but having the entrepreneurial skill to create their own options.



Conclusion

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, more American families than ever see value in alternatives to district schools, and more education choice programs are giving them access.

Public school teachers can benefit.

The expansion of choice affords them more opportunity to free themselves from environments that too often stifle and frustrate them, and to create environments that are in line with their ideals for teaching and learning.





To see the full report, go to:

<https://bit.ly/3JKECtY>