

An Interview with Mark Beidron, co-founder of the Willow School- a school in Gladstone, New Jersey built with sustainability in mind.

Q: Tell us about the Willow School and your philosophy.

Beidron: The Willow School has 3 main objectives; (1) mastery of the English Language for its students, (2) creating an environment that fosters the joy of learning and (3) to implement core virtues into the curriculum.

There is a hidden curriculum in nature. The Willow School concentrates on teaching prescience, the consequences of actions and, the interconnectedness of variables. It is the Willow School's philosophy that most built structures exist solely for the elevation of society. That is, that most engineered buildings serve society while depressing nature. All of the structures at the Willow School are somehow connected to nature and actually serve the landscape over time without taking away ecological productivity. Further, the buildings also serve as a teaching tool and are connected to curriculum. Simply put, the buildings themselves become a teacher and the entire school is a laboratory.

Q: How would you attempt to implement Sustainability in existing Schools?

Beidron: It is easier to implement sustainable behavior when starting from scratch since implementing new, more sustainable, practices in already existing schools may be more difficult. It is first important to begin with indoor air quality. I think that is most likely the single most important environmental component to in a classroom setting. It is also important to begin by motivating the children in the classroom. Children are the most important catalyst for change in schools and beyond. I have experienced several calls from parents of children at the school that say that their children have made suggestions on more sustainable practices in their homes, bringing sustainable behavior that was learned in the classroom home to their parents.

Q: Do you have any suggestions to those (parents/teachers/students) who might want to start to implement more sustainable practices in their school?

Beidron: I would say to implement sustainable behavior in existing schools that stakeholders need to have the tools necessary to first assess the current status of their school. If stakeholders can first recognize what needs to be changed, and are then provided possible courses of action, then they can enact change.