

# ENRMidwest

ENR Midwest's 2018 Best Projects

## Green Projects: Sunset Ridge School



Sunset Ridge School District 29 replaced its 85-year-old building with a 73,890-sq-ft collaborative, interactive learning environment.

*PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL SCHLISMANN*



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*November 20, 2018*

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## **Sunset Ridge School**

Northfield, Ill.

### **Best Project**

**Owner:** Sunset Ridge School District 29

**General Contractor:** Pepper Construction Co.

**Lead Design Firm:** Wight & Co.

**MEP Engineer:** Wight & Co.

**Planner:** BrainSpaces Inc.

Sunset Ridge School District 29 replaced its 85-year-old building with a 73,890-sq-ft collaborative, interactive and technology-based learning environment. The LEED Platinum-certified facility serves approximately 300 fourth through eighth grade students and is the first public school in Illinois designed to be net-zero energy, producing at least as much energy as it uses. General contractor Pepper achieved the required construction and materials/resources points by using recycled, locally sourced materials, wood from the previous school's gymnasium and recycled construction waste. Architect Wight & Co. added energy usage displays and onsite water conservation practices as part of its design, and those building features are integrated into the curriculum.

Leanne Meyer-Smith, vice president of Wight & Co., describes the aesthetic as very contextual to the neighborhood, incorporating elements and materials in the natural, warm tones seen throughout Northfield, Ill.

The school's grades are organized into three academic neighborhoods based on children's developmental needs. The two-story Learning Commons connects the academic neighborhoods on both floors. The academic groups have their own color palettes that are used together in the two-story library. The school was designed by Wight and site planner Brainspaces to provide private individual work areas, small work spaces for groups and

larger common areas. Learning stations have scannable QR codes, which enable students to learn about energy through the building's photovoltaic roof panels as well as how plumbing works through waterless heaters.

Sunset Ridge School District 29, Wight and Pepper were all involved in the design phase of the \$29-million project, with sustainability, high-performance elements and technology representing their core goals. The finished design included science and language laboratories, daylighting throughout the interior spaces and a maker's space where students can explore, create and build. A living wall of plants is located in the main corridor. A rain garden on the sky deck was designed to be another learning environment where rainwater is collected and recycled.

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