



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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Space to Grow partners kick off another school year by transforming new schoolyard at Whistler Elementary School



Space to Grow Partners, including MWRD President Kari K. Steele, Healthy Schools Campaign, Openlands, Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Department of Water Management joined Principal Katina Manuel and students at Whistler Elementary School to cut the ribbon on a new schoolyard.



(Back row, L to R): Chicago Department of Water Management Managing Deputy Commissioner William Cheeks, MWRD President Kari K. Steele and Whistler Elementary School Principal Katina Manuel celebrate the new Space to Grow schoolyard.

A brave generation of students now has a resilient schoolyard to match. Students at Whistler Elementary School, 11533 S. Ada St., sprinted out to play and celebrate a new playground, basketball court, track and turf field, intertwined with rain gardens and permeable surfaces all meant to address stormwater and give students a bright and shiny place to play through the vision of the award-winning Space to Grow partnership.

This partnership between the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD), Chicago Public Schools, Chicago Department of Water Management, Healthy Schools Campaign and Openlands transforms Chicago schoolyards into beautiful, vibrant and functional community spaces for physical activity, outdoor learning, environmental literacy and art, while addressing neighborhood flooding issues and community engagement. The new school-

yard at Whistler can hold almost 154,000 gallons of stormwater every time it rains.

“Just as these playgrounds work above ground to create a new place to hang out with friends and classmates, they are also impressive below the surface to protect our communities from flooding,” said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. “These upgrades reduce flooding, reduce basement backups, reduce the load on the combined sewer system, and equally as important, educate students and neighbors about green infrastructure.”

The new schoolyard replaces an asphalt lot in which water would pool up and puddle and later cause flooding in parts of the school. Upgrades include a turf field, playground, rain gardens with a stone riverbed and outdoor classroom with native plants and chairs and tables made from recycled plastic within the school’s courtyard.

(continued)

Space to Grow transforms schoolyard at Whistler Elementary, *cont.*

We are delighted to celebrate the first of five schoolyards we plan to unveil in 2021 and welcome students and teachers back to a new school year with a new and wonderful environment to learn and play,” said MWRD Commissioner Kimberly Du Buclet. “These new schoolyard amenities are beautiful and deserving of Whistler students and teachers’ hard work and persistence to overcome so many obstacles to return to school this year during the pandemic.”

Space to Grow has now completed 26 schoolyards, with 30 set to be completed in the fall. These 30 schoolyards bring the grand total of storage volume to 5.6 million gallons per rain event, equal to 8.4 Olympic-size pools or 111,108 bathtubs per rain event.



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Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

Established in 1889, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois. Learn more at mwrld.org.