



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

Allison Fore

Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Officer

312.751.6626

allison.fore@mwrdd.org

100 East Erie Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611

For immediate release

July 8, 2020

## MWRD to study suburban schoolyard stormwater management opportunities

*Motion advances that could clear way to more permeable schoolyards*



*Before and after images of Wadsworth Elementary School on Chicago's South Side show drastic improvements to a schoolyard.*

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) Board of Commissioners recently passed a motion unanimously to study the feasibility of expanding green infrastructure to suburban school campuses.

The study, authorized in the wake of recent record-setting rains, will explore the potential for following a successful formula to soak rainwater into the ground in ways that reduce flooding. The formula—called Space to Grow—currently only exists in the city of Chicago as a partnership among the MWRD, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Chicago Department of Water Management, the Healthy Schools Campaign, and Openlands. The popular Space to Grow program transforms Chicago schoolyards into beautiful, vibrant and functional community spaces for physical

activity, outdoor learning, environmental literacy and engagement with art, while addressing neighborhood flooding issues and engaging the community. The motion allows the MWRD to consider expanding similar programs to suburban Cook County community schools.

“Greening schools isn’t just a win-win. It’s a triple-win,” said MWRD Commissioner Cam Davis, who presented the motion at the May 21 Board of Commissioners meeting in his capacity as chair of the Board’s Public Health & Welfare Committee. “The study could lead to an educational opportunity for students, reduced flooding especially in disproportionately-impacted communities, and keeping jobs local that can’t be outsourced at a time when unemployment is spiking.” *(continued)*

## MWRD to study suburban schoolyard stormwater protection, *cont.*



*Space to Grow partners transformed Davis Elementary School in Chicago's Brighton Park neighborhood into a vibrant place to play and collect more stormwater in 2017. The schoolyard retains nearly 200,000 gallons of rain per storm event and gives students a place to play and learn.*



Since 2014, the Space to Grow partnership has converted 20 schoolyards, providing an engaging place to learn and grow, as well as major stormwater capacity. These schoolyards combine for a total storage volume of 3.6 million gallons. This design retention capacity is equivalent to 5.5 Olympic-size pools or 66,341 bathtubs per rain event.

In addition to providing school communities with increased protection from stormwater, they also reduce the load on the combined sewer system, helping the City's water resources stay clean. Further, Space to Grow schoolyards help CPS meet daily recess and physical education requirements for elementary schools and educate students and neighbors about green infrastructure techniques and purpose.

“While we're seeing more rain every spring, this study will be a good chance for the MWRD to pursue relieving some pressure on neighborhoods by



*In late 2019, Space to Grow partners completed a new schoolyard at Niños Heroes Elementary School in the South Chicago neighborhood, incorporating new permeable features that will allow the campus to retain more than 179,000 gallons of water each time it rains. The MWRD is considering plans to expand similar green infrastructure programs in suburban school districts.*

addressing schoolyard flooding in the suburbs,” said MWRD Vice President Barbara McGowan.

### ***Recovering Resources, Transforming Water***

*Established in 1889, the MWRD ([www.mwr.org](http://www.mwr.org)) is an award winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.*