



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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Space to Grow partners unveil first new schoolyard of 2019



Space to Grow Partners, including MWRD President Kari K. Steele, teamed up with Westcott Elementary School officials, 17th Ward Ald. David Moore and community leaders from Chatham and Auburn Gresham neighborhoods to announce the completion of a new schoolyard at the school.

A South Side schoolyard was transformed into a vibrant place to play, while capturing more stormwater to protect the neighboring community from flooding, thanks to funding and support from the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) and partners at Space to Grow.

Oliver S. Westcott Elementary School, 409 W. 80th St., became the latest Chicago Public School (CPS) campus to receive a dramatic upgrade through Space to Grow, a partnership formed by the MWRD, CPS, Chicago Department of Water Management (CDWM), Openlands and the Healthy Schools Campaign. Westcott is the 16th schoolyard that Space to Grow has transformed into beautiful and functional spaces to learn, garden and play outside, and the first of five to be completed in 2019.

“We are happy to take part in this incredible Space to Grow partnership that continues to spread throughout

Chicago to brighten our schools and communities,” said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. “We hope Westcott students and teachers enjoy their new schoolyard and take away an additional lesson into the power of managing our stormwater and improving local water quality through green infrastructure.”

Space to Grow prioritizes physical activity, outdoor learning and community engagement, but also incorporates landscape features that use special design elements to help reduce neighborhood flooding. New permeable surfaces capture more rainfall, helping keep the city’s water resources clean by reducing the flow of water taxing local combined sewer systems. The new schoolyard will be able to retain more than 152,000 gallons of stormwater per rain event. The five CPS schoolyards renovated in 2019 were designed to retain more than 881,000 gallons of water per rain event. Altogether, the 16 completed Space to Grow schools can now store close to 3 million gallons per rain event. *(continued)*

Space to Grow partners unveil first new schoolyard of 2019, *cont.*



Westcott Elementary School students will benefit from a new schoolyard provided by Space to Grow partners to improve amenities and provide stormwater retention for more than 150,000 gallons of water per storm event.



Space to Grow partners unveiled the new schoolyard during a ribbon cutting event on Oct. 4. President Steele, CDWM General Supt. John Gallagher, Healthy Schools Campaign Director of Chicago Programs Rosa Ramirez Richter, Openlands President and CEO Gerald Adelman and Openlands Vice President of Community Conservation Daniella Pereira joined Ald. David Moore (17th Ward), Principal Monique Dockery, Carlos Nelson, of the Greater Auburn Gresham Community Development, and hundreds of students and teachers and Westcott families.

The new schoolyard at Westcott will feature a track, play equipment for all ages, an outdoor classroom and rain gardens. The project also upgraded the basketball and tennis courts and a baseball diamond. Some of the unique features at Westcott include an outdoor classroom, permeable rubber playground areas with gravel storage underneath; large stormwater storage tunnels underground to reduce flooding, and bioswales, rain gardens, and native planting areas to help soak up stormwater. Big Green Chicago partnered with the school to

provide raised beds for growing nutritious food. Edible plant garden planters will be installed at a later date.

“We thank the Westcott Elementary School community, Principal Dockery, Ald. Moore and our key Space to Grow partners for embracing our mission to protect and invest in communities from flooding and improve our area water quality,” said MWRD Commissioner Kimberly Du Buclet. “Through this vital partnership we can better leverage resources to improve Westcott students’ learning environment and serve as an anchor for the entire community.”

In addition to providing community members in low-income neighborhoods with safe outdoor spaces to play and stay active, Space to Grow schoolyards help CPS meet daily recess and physical education requirements for elementary schools. These green schoolyards also provide a daily connection to nature, which can help reduce stress and improve academic performance. For more information, visit www.spacetogrowchicago.org.

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Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

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