



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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For immediate release

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Space to Grow program unveils two new schoolyard transformations



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago President Mariyana Spyropoulos (fourth from left) joins community leaders and students at Orozco Academy to commemorate the opening of a new schoolyard that includes a new playground area among other \$1.5 million in improvements to better capture stormwater.

Joining school leaders and students and various organizations, officials with the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) helped unveil two new schoolyard transformations that embrace the agency's pursuit of stormwater management, solutions to flooding and civic engagement.

Ribbon cuttings were held and new school grounds were celebrated at Willa Cather Elementary School, 2908 W. Washington Blvd., and Orozco Academy, 1940 W. 18th St. The schools each received a \$1.5 million schoolyard transformation from the Space to Grow program, an innovative public-private partnership co-managed by the Healthy Schools Campaign and Openlands. The program aims to develop Chicago schoolyards into centers of school and community life that support active and healthy lifestyles, outdoor learning, physical education and engagement with nature.

Along with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and the Chicago Department of Water Management (DWM), the MWRD offers the program funding and technical support from its engineers. They completed four elementary schools in 2014 and two more finished in 2015. The DWM and the MWRD share the cost of the green infrastructure components and CPS assumes all costs associated with all recreational improvements. The partnership has received many awards, including the U.S. Green Building Council Illinois Chapter Mission Award, the National Physical Activity Plan Champions Award and Illinois Association of Floodplain and Stormwater Management's Sustainability Award.

"We are thrilled to open these new schoolyards to this wonderful group of students and teachers and their respective communities," said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos. "Since 2013, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater (continued)



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Chicago has worked with these talented organizations to minimize flooding and reduce stormwater runoff at schools by replacing impermeable asphalt surfaces with green infrastructure, such as permeable pavement and rain gardens. By making these improvements, we are also breathing new excitement into these communities and empowering them with the tools to manage today's water."

Cather, situated in the East Garfield Park neighborhood, enrolls 352 students, and approximately 97 percent are low-income, while Orozco Academy, in the Lower West Side neighborhood, enrolls 583 students, of which 90 percent are low income.

Work at Cather is designed to accommodate more than 56,000 gallons of stormwater. Improvements include: a multipurpose turf field with bases for baseball, a three-lane jogging track, permeable asphalt areas, a refurbished full basketball court with sleeves for tennis and volleyball nets, play equipment for younger and older students, an outdoor classroom area, native gardens and trees, a rain garden with native plants, vegetable gardens, benches and seating throughout the schoolyard.

The stormwater management improvements at Orozco are



Students enjoy new outdoor spaces at Cather Elementary School thanks in part to the Space to Grow program, which the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago is a partner. In addition to installing new permeable playing fields, a native garden was recently planted there.

designed to have the capacity to hold more than 303,000 gallons of water. Improvements include: a multipurpose turf field, play equipment for younger and older students, an outdoor classroom area, permeable pavers, a rain garden with native plants, native gardens and trees, vegetable gardens, drinking water fountains and seating throughout the schoolyard.

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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.