



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## Space to Grow program promotes equitable water future for Chicago



*The dramatic transformation of the playground and parking lot at Wadsworth Elementary School demonstrates the effectiveness of the Space to Grow program, which was highlighted in a new national report exploring opportunities to build more equitable water systems.*

A new national report released by the US Water Alliance acknowledged a partnership involving the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) for its ability to maximize environmental and community benefits through the transformation of local schoolyards.

The Space to Grow program was highlighted in the national briefing paper, “An Equitable Water Future,” as a case study that exemplified how water infrastructure investments can lead to neighborhood revitalization. The US Water Alliance report focused on how water management impacts vulnerable communities, and showcased promising strategies and practices that have emerged to make water systems more equitable. The report singled out Space to Grow, documenting how the program creates synergistic benefits between multiple infrastructure investments, channels green infrastructure to disinvested neighborhoods and cultivates resident and community stewardship of water projects.

“The collaboration between Space to Grow partners improves schoolyards and spurs new partnerships among the entire school community,” said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos. “Thank you to the US Water Alliance for sharing these strategies for advancing water equity. We believe we all have a role in ensuring no community is left behind in managing our precious natural resource.”

The Space to Grow program partners with many Chicago school communities and transforms their asphalt schoolyards into safe, permeable spaces where students can play and the community can enjoy. The new grounds provide outdoor classrooms, edible gardens, turf fields, tracks, basketball and tennis courts, and playground equipment, encouraging healthy lifestyles and community involvement while retaining mass quantities of water. Space to Grow partners include MWRD, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the Chicago Department of Water Management, Openlands and the Healthy Schools Campaign. *(continued)*

## Space to Grow program promotes equitable water future for Chicago *(continued)*

Through these partnerships, Space to Grow has implemented green infrastructure in schoolyards that helps address flooding and changes the way stormwater is managed on public property. The partnership's work benefits Chicago's schools, students, communities, as well as the local environment.

"Space to Grow builds capacity in a school's ability to retain water and mitigate flooding, but more importantly it empowers residents and students with critical knowledge and new tools, promotes equitable water management and improves a community's quality of life," said MWRD Commissioner Timothy Bradford.

"This report validates our work in managing excess stormwater and community engagement."

The report lays out water stress issues plaguing vulnerable communities and addresses the pillars of water equity. These pillars include ensuring all people have access to clean, safe and affordable water service; maximizing the community and economic benefits of water infrastructure investment; and fostering community resilience in the face of a changing climate. The full report is available online [here](#). For more information, visit [www.uswateralliance.org/](http://www.uswateralliance.org/).

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### 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.*