



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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New school year opens at Cook Academy with dynamic schoolyard thanks to Space to Grow partners



MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos and Commissioner Ken Dunkin celebrated the opening of a new schoolyard at Cook Academy with Space to Grow partners from the Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Department of Water Management, Openlands and the Healthy Schools Campaign.

Students returning to an elementary school in the Auburn Gresham neighborhood had something to look forward to outside the classroom after a campus transformation was completed to improve outdoor spaces and protect the community from flooding.

Partners with the Space to Grow program, including the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD), officially opened a new schoolyard at John W. Cook Academy, 8150 S. Bishop St. on Sept. 5, alongside officials with the Healthy Schools Campaign, Openlands, Chicago Department of Water Management and Chicago Public Schools (CPS).

This is the twelfth Space to Grow school completed through the partnership. Space to Grow 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 community participation.



Cook Academy students enjoy a new playground provided through Space to Grow. The unique partnership promotes outdoor recreation while building permeable grounds that can mitigate flooding.

“We thank our Space to Grow partners for their investments in stormwater management and recognize John W. Cook Academy as a sustainable campus benefiting the students and faculty as well as the environment,” said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos. “We hope these schoolyard improvements give students and their families a positive outlook on the school year ahead.”

The new features at Cook Academy include a turf field for sports and play, play equipment for all ages, outdoor classroom areas, basketball courts, chess tables, rain gardens with native plants, benches and seating.

Cook Academy can now hold 217,978 gallons of water per storm event. That is water that formerly flooded streets and parking lots or overwhelmed local combined sewer system during major rain events. The improvements will reduce the load of water and educate students and neighbors about the powers of green infrastructure.

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New school year opens at Cook Academy with dynamic schoolyard *(cont.)*

“The Space to Grow campus transformation at Cook Academy provides a community space for recreation, alleviates local flooding and provides an education into the benefits of green infrastructure,” said MWRD Commissioner Ken Dunkin. “Through the completion of this project, Space to Grow partners are showing how much we can accomplish together in delivering various benefits that improve the quality life for future generations.”

Space to Grow schoolyards help CPS students meet daily recess and physical education requirements for ele-

mentary schools, while also providing a daily connection to nature, which research has shown helps reduce stress and improve academic performance.

The Space to Grow partners are on schedule to transform six schoolyards this year, capturing approximately 1,280,025 gallons per storm event. Once completed, there will be 15 total schoolyards completed that have the ability to capture a combined 2,762,144 million gallons of storage, equivalent to 4.2 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

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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.