



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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For immediate release

September 11, 2018

## Space to Grow transforms Fernwood Elementary schoolyard in Chicago



*Fernwood Elementary School's new playground and playing field designed to absorb stormwater was formally unveiled on August 31 as MWRD commissioners, CPS officials, school administration and students, Openlands, Healthy Schools Campaign and Chicago Department of Water Management cut the ceremonial ribbon.*

As a new school year dawns, an elementary school in the Washington Heights neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago has taken on a bright new appearance designed to improve outdoor spaces while protecting 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 Fernwood Elementary School, 10041 S. Union St., alongside officials with the Healthy Schools Campaign, Openlands, Chicago Department of Water Management and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) on Aug. 31.

This is the eleventh 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. "We are delighted to deliver this project on time for the new



*(L-R) MWRD Commissioner Josina Morita, President Mariyana Spyropoulos, Commissioner Kari K. Steele and Chicago Department of Water Management Commissioner Randy Conner.*

school year, while improving community spaces for students and their families and addressing stormwater management in the process," said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos. "We thank our Space to Grow partners and recognize Fernwood Elementary as a model campus for green infrastructure."

Thanks to the new campus improvements, Fernwood can now hold 138,222 gallons of water per storm event. This water formerly flooded streets and parking lots and overwhelmed the local combined sewer system during major rain events. The improvements will reduce the water load while educating students and neighbors about the powers of green infrastructure.

"The Space to Grow campus transformations at Fernwood work to not only mitigate flooding concerns, but also improve educational amenities," said MWRD Commissioner Kari K. Steele. "We thank our project partners who place such a high importance on education and stormwater management."

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## Space to Grow transforms Fernwood Elementary schoolyard (cont.)

Space to Grow schoolyards help CPS students meet daily recess and physical education requirements for elementary schools, while also providing a daily connection to nature, which research has shown helps reduce stress and improve academic performance.

The green schoolyards incorporate landscape features that capture a significant amount of rainfall, helping keep the city's water resources clean and resulting in less neighborhood flooding. Each Space to Grow schoolyard uses special surfaces and design elements to capture rainwater.

"To learn effectively, children need fresh air and exercise, and we are thrilled to participate in this program that provides that opportunity," said Commissioner Josina Morita.

Fernwood Elementary School includes basketball courts, rain gardens, native plantings, an outdoor classroom, play equipment for all ages, permeable rubber play surfacing, a hopscotch area, natural seating areas, an artificial turf playfield, a small raised stage area, a concrete runnel that features visible stormwater flow, and an underground stormwater storage and infiltration system.



The Space to Grow partners are on schedule to completely transform six schoolyards this year, capturing approximately 1,280,025 gallons per storm event. The first 15 schoolyards combined have the ability to capture 2.8 million (2,764,181 to be precise) gallons of storage, equivalent to 4.2 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

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### Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

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