



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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Space to Grow celebrates new schoolyard at Morton School of Excellence

East Garfield Park neighborhood to benefit from stormwater improvements



Morton School of Excellence Principal Peggie Burnett-Wise (left) joined MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos, Commissioner Ken Dunkin, students and leaders with Space to Grow Partners from the Chicago Department of Water Management, Openlands, Healthy Schools Campaign and Chicago Public Schools to brave the rainy, blustery conditions to celebrate a new schoolyard at Morton School.

Space to Grow partners unveiled the fifth schoolyard transformation in Chicago this year, this time enhancing public access for students at an East Garfield Park neighborhood school, while also alleviating community flooding concerns.

Through a new green and permeable schoolyard at Morton School of Excellence, 431 N. Troy St., students and their families now have an attractive place to play and an education into how they can manage stormwater and protect their environment.

Space to Grow, a partnership formed between the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD), Chicago Public Schools, the Department of Water Management, Openlands and Healthy Schools Campaign has now completed 14 schoolyards. Each is transformed 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.

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Space to Grow celebrates new schoolyard at Morton School, *cont.*

Thanks to the many improvements and innovative green engineering solutions to soak up rain where it falls, the campus can now retain 151,365 gallons of water during each rain event. This is water that is kept out of the sewer system and, ultimately, out of nearby homes and local waterways.

“The MWRD is proud to be a Space to Grow partner and call attention to the importance of outdoor access, community engagement and stormwater management in our schools,” said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos. “We are thrilled that in addition to all of what is below the surface, this school and neighborhood now have a beautiful space to play, to connect with nature, learn outdoors and to gather.”

The new features at Morton include basketball courts and two artificial turf areas, one of which is a flexible field area and a second football and soccer field that is lighted at night. Underneath the fields are underground stormwater storage and infiltration systems. In addition, Space to Grow improvements will allow for new playground equipment, permeable rubber play surfacing, bioretention areas with bioswales and native planting areas and community gardening plots to be installed in the spring. Campus improvements also consist of hopscotch and foursquare areas, interpretive signage, new disability parking spots and an outdoor classroom.

The rainwater that is captured will be collected from the roof and parking lot and soaked into the ground. Downspouts were also disconnected from the school roof to divert water to new green infrastructure to naturally soak into the ground rather than previously draining to the combined sewer that when overwhelmed can pollute local waterways.

“This is a fantastic project that was truly needed in this neighborhood,” said Chicago’s 27th Ward Alderman Walter Burnett, Jr. “I am sincerely grateful to the partners for their attention and commitment to bring this project to fruition.”



Morton School of Excellence students show their gratitude to Space to Grow partners for the new schoolyard that will enhance their recess time and alleviate neighborhood flooding.

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.

“Space to Grow represents an important investment in our communities to help reduce flooding while providing beneficial green space for students, schools and neighbors,” said MWRD Commissioner Ken Dunkin. “Thank you to Space to Grow partners for their commitment to transforming these campuses and making a positive difference in our students’ lives.”

In addition to providing community members in low-income neighborhoods with safe outdoor spaces to play and stay active, Space to Grow schoolyards help Chicago Public Schools meet daily recess and physical education requirements for elementary schools. These green schoolyards also provide a daily connection to nature, which research has shown helps reduce stress and improve academic performance.

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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.