



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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Space to Grow partners transform schoolyards, brighten play areas, mitigate flooding for South Side communities

O’Keeffe and Wentworth are the 29th and 30th schools completed



Space to Grow partners and school leaders from O’Keeffe School (left) and Wentworth Elementary School commemorate the new schoolyards.

Space to Grow partners unveiled the last two schoolyard transformations for 2021, creating beautiful, vibrant and functional community spaces on the South Side to capture more stormwater and brighten the day for students and their families.

Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) President Kari K. Steele and MWRD staff joined Space to Grow partners from the Chicago Department of Water Management, Chicago Public Schools, Openlands and Healthy Schools Campaign to cut the ribbon on new schoolyards at Isabelle C. O’Keeffe School, 6940 S. Merrill Ave., and Wentworth Elementary School, 1340 W. 71st St.

“We are thrilled that in addition to all of what is below the ground that the O’Keeffe and Wentworth school communities now have a beautiful space to play above the ground,” said President Steele. “Thank you to all

of the partners and the entire school community that helped build and will maintain these spaces.”

O’Keeffe’s schoolyard can hold 250,064 gallons of stormwater per rain event and includes an artificial turf field, porous playground surfacing, several play hills and rain gardens, and an outdoor classroom.

Wentworth’s schoolyard can hold 196,358 gallons of stormwater per rain event and includes an artificial turf field, basketball courts, porous playground surfacing, a nature play area, several play hills and rain gardens, two outdoor classrooms and a downspout connection that will take the runoff from the roof and store it below the playing area to allow the water to better infiltrate the ground.

The schoolyards create multiple benefits. In addition to providing community members in low-income neighborhoods with safe outdoor spaces (*continued*)

Space to Grow partners transform schoolyards for South Side, *cont.*



Students at O'Keeffe School enjoy the new playground made possible through the contributions of Space to Grow partners constructing permeable play areas and rain gardens to capture more stormwater, mitigate flooding, improve play areas and encourage outdoor access.

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.

Each Space to Grow schoolyard uses special surfaces and design elements to capture rainwater. As a result, the projects reduce flooding, reduce basement backups, reduce the load on the combined sewer system, and educate students and neighbors about green infrastructure techniques and purpose.



Students at Wentworth will benefit from new schoolyards designed to capture more water to mitigate flooding through Space to Grow.

“Space to Grow schoolyards give our children and their families a vibrant place to play and an education on the importance of green infrastructure,” said MWRD Commissioner Kimberly Du Buclet. “But equally as important, the permeable schoolyards protect the city’s water resources and reduce flooding in the neighborhood.”

Space to Grow has now completed 30 schoolyard renovations in Chicago, bringing the grand total of storage volume to 5.6 million gallons per rain event. This design retention capacity is equivalent to 8.4 Olympic-size pools or 111,108 bathtubs per rain event.

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Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

Established in 1889, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois. Learn more at mwrdd.org.