



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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For immediate release

November 9, 2022

Edward Coles School in South Chicago now has space to grow, play and manage stormwater

A partnership involving the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) that blends stormwater management components with outdoor play improvements has transformed an old asphalt playlot into a vibrant place to play and learn at Edward Coles School.

It is the 32nd schoolyard conversion completed by the Space to Grow® partnership since 2014, but Coles School, at 8441 S. Yates Blvd., stands in a league of its own for being able to capture more water than any other school to date: 568,534 gallons each time it rains. Space to Grow® partners, including the MWRD, Chicago Department of Water Management, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Healthy Schools Campaign and Openlands joined students, teachers and school leaders to celebrate the new schoolyard with a ribbon cutting on Oct. 28.

“The new schoolyard at Coles School offers students a dynamic place to play, learn and grow while allowing the neighboring community to benefit from the green infrastructure elements that mitigate flooding and improve water quality,” said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. “We hope students and families enjoy all the features that have been included in this beautiful schoolyard.”

The schoolyard includes an artificial turf field, basketball courts, porous playground surfacing, several play hills and rain gardens, and an outdoor classroom.

Coles School is uniquely located above a seam of sandy soils, allowing it to hold 568,534 gallons of stormwater per rain event. That is equivalent to filling more than 13,500 bathtubs or 300,000 basketballs, an enormous amount of water kept out of the sewer system and nearby homes when heavy rains



(Back row, L to R): Chicago Department of Water Management Superintendent of Construction and Maintenance Anthony Falada, MWRD Commissioner Kimberly Du Buclet, MWRD President Kari K. Steele, 7th Ward Ald. Greg Mitchell, MWRD Commissioner Mariyana Spyropoulos, Edward Coles School Principal Charlie McSpadden, and Openlands Vice President of Community Conservation Daniella Pereira celebrate the new schoolyard at Coles School with students.

ensue. The schoolyard thus reduces flooding, reduces basement backups, reduces the load on the combined sewer system, and educates students and neighbors about green infrastructure techniques and purpose.

“This new schoolyard offers students, teachers and the community an attractive place to gather while also building resilience in anticipation of future storms,” said MWRD Commissioner Kimberly Du Buclet. “Thank you to our Space to Grow® partners for protecting our water environment and their commitment to improving the lives and learning experience for Coles School students.”

In addition to providing community members in low-income neighborhoods with safe outdoor spaces to play and stay active, Space to Grow® schoolyards help CPS meet daily recess and physical education requirements for elementary schools. These green schoolyards also provide a daily *(continued)*

Edward Coles School in South Chicago now has space to grow, *cont.*



Before and after images illustrate the playground and permeable surface improvements at Coles School.

connection to nature, which research has shown helps reduce stress and improve academic performance.

Coles is the second of four \$1.5-million schoolyards that the Space to Grow® partnership is set to unveil this fall. Once the ribbons are cut, 34 Space to Grow

schools will have been completed since 2014, bringing the grand total of storage volume to 6.5 million gallons per rain event. This design retention capacity is equivalent to 9.9 Olympic-size pools or 130,731 bathtubs per rain event.



The Coles School community celebrated its new schoolyard created by Space to Grow® partners on a sunny late October afternoon with performances, football, basketball, poms, dancing and smiles.

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 mwrld.org.