



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## Space to Grow transforms schoolyard, mitigates flooding at Mireles Academy

*South Chicago neighborhood school shines on rainy days*



President Steele, center, surrounded by happy, cheering Arnold Mireles Academy students at their new playground.

Even a burst of morning rain could not dampen spirits on October 14 at Arnold Mireles Academy in the South Chicago neighborhood, because now students have a vibrant and resilient place to play. Thanks to a schoolyard transformation by Space to Grow partners, an old asphalt lot that puddled when it rained was converted into a permeable play area designed to take on excess water and allow students important—and fun—outdoor access.

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) and Space to Grow partners from the Chicago Department of Water Management (DWM), Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Healthy Schools Campaign and Openlands unveiled the new schoolyard at 9000 S. Exchange Ave. MWRD President Kari K. Steele, CPS CEO Pedro Martinez, DWM Commissioner Andrea Cheng, Healthy Schools Campaign Senior Vice President Claire Marcy, and Openlands Vice President for Commu-



Space to Grow Partners (L-R): Openlands Vice President for Community Conservation Daniella Pereira, Chicago Department of Water Management Commissioner Andrea Cheng, Healthy Schools Campaign Senior Vice President Claire Marcy, MWRD President Kari K. Steele, Mireles Academy students, Chicago Public Schools CEO Pedro Martinez, Mireles Principal Evelyn Randle-Robbins, and CPS Chief of Schools Network 12 Shenette Parks officially opened the new Mireles schoolyard.

nity Conservation Daniella Pereira officially cut the ribbon on the new schoolyard alongside Mireles Principal Evelyn Randle-Robbins and students to introduce a new lesson on green infrastructure.

“We are happy to unveil this latest Space to Grow project and turn a Chicago schoolyard into beautiful and functional community space for physical activity, outdoor learning, art engagement and access to the environment,” said MWRD President Steele. “But equally as unique, this space will also address neighborhood flooding issues by using green infrastructure, special surfaces and design elements to capture more rainwater.”

Mireles’ new schoolyard can hold 208,114 gallons of stormwater per rain event. It accomplishes (*continued*)

## South Chicago neighborhood school shines on rainy days, *cont.*

this through several permeable additions to the schoolyard. It features a new artificial turf field, a large rain garden, a nature-play area, an outdoor classroom with permeable pavers and a porous playground surfacing below a new zip line, swings, slides and other play areas.

The campus renovation reduces basement backups, reduces the load on the combined sewer system and educates students and neighbors about green infrastructure techniques and purpose.

“The green infrastructure amenities Space to Grow has installed at Mireles Academy absorb more wa-

ter and prevent it from overwhelming local sewers, basements, waterways and streets and can lead to improved water quality in our community when we can properly treat and clean this stormwater runoff,” said MWRD Commissioner Kimberly Du Buclet.

Space to Grow has now completed 28 schoolyards, with two more set to be completed in 2021. These 30 schoolyards bring the grand total of storage volume to 5.6 million gallons per rain event, equal 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 [mwrld.org](http://mwrld.org).*