



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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Award-winning partnership builds healthy playgrounds, captures stormwater



MWRD President Mariyana T. Spyropoulos and Commissioner Kari Steele stand with other school and government officials at the Grissom Elementary grand opening celebration.

Not only is an innovative partnership formed less than a year ago beginning to make a big impact on area schools and localized flooding, it has already received national attention and three awards.

The City of Chicago, Chicago Public Schools, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD), Openlands and Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC) partnership known as "Space to Grow" received a "New Champions" award from the National Physical Activity Plan Alliance (NPAPA). This organization recognizes the efforts of hundreds of organizations working to promote

opportunities for physical activity among people in various settings, physical abilities and ages. The partnership also received the Sustainability award from the Illinois Association for Floodplain and Stormwater Management (IAFSM) which recognizes excellence in stormwater management across the state of Illinois. Last fall, Space to Grow won a Silver Ribbon Award from Friends of the Chicago River for its creative approach to river sensitive design and implementation.

Space to Grow is a unique public-private partnership that transforms Chicago (continued)



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One of four pilot schools participating in the MWRD-funded Space To Grow partnership in 2014, ground was broken at Schmid Elementary School June 12, 2014 and transformed with green infrastructure improvements by its unveiling on Oct. 22, 2014.



MWRD Exec. Director David St. Pierre, President Mariyana T. Spyropoulos and Vice President Barbara McGowan cut the ribbon on the new playground at Leland Elementary School with staff from Openlands, Healthy Schools, Space to Grow and school community.



Virgil Grissom Elementary School's grounds prior to transformation with green infrastructure improvements on June 18, 2014.



Grissom Elementary's grounds after transformation with green infrastructure improvements on Oct. 18, 2014.

schoolyards into vibrant outdoor spaces that encourage physical activity, outdoor learning and community engagement, while addressing broader environmental issues, including stormwater management and water conservation. In addition to providing community members in low-income neighborhoods with safe outdoor spaces to play and be active, Space to Grow schoolyards help Chicago Public Schools meet its daily recess and physical education requirements for elementary schools.

On Feb. 24, HSC President and CEO Rochelle Davis accepted the Champions Award on behalf of

Space to Grow at NPAP's fourth annual national congress in Washington, D.C.

"It's an incredible honor for Space to Grow to be recognized nationally for the positive impact the program has had in transforming Chicago schoolyards into much-needed outdoor spaces for children and their families to play and be active," said Davis. MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos said that "not only do school children benefit from the improved outdoor play areas, but the community benefits from the increased capacity of the schoolyard to capture water which prevents localized (continued)



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flooding. This is a multi-faceted partnership, and I hope other cities and organizations are inspired to work together in such a fashion to improve their schools and communities.”

Six more schools are slated for renovations this year: Cather Elementary, Corkery Elementary, Gunsaulus Scholastic Academy, Orozco Academy, Wadsworth Elementary and Westcott Elementary. For more information about Space to Grow, visit www.mwr.org and spacetogrowchicago.org.



Students and community members participate in a Space to Grow planting event at Leland Elementary School.



Ground was broken at Morrill Math & Science Elementary School July 11, 2014 and transformed with green infrastructure improvements.



Educational signs are an important enhancement in Space to Grow projects. Permeable pavers allow water to slowly filter into the ground and help to prevent flooding. The Morrill School transformation was unveiled on October 11, 2014.

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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.