MWRD's Time-lapse video captures transformation

The campus of an elementary school in Chicago's Woodlawn neighborhood has undergone a stunning transformation that will provide an education in stormwater management that extends beyond the traditional classroom. The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) documented the transformation from demolition through completion using time-lapse video. To view the three minute footage, visit https://youtu.be/s5Hx-3f2CkzM.

As a participant in the Space to Grow program, the James Wadsworth Elementary School at 6650 S. Ellis has a new look to its schoolyard with a new play area, community space and landscaping that will retain more than 130,000 gallons of rainwater.

Space to Grow converts Chicago schoolyards into community spaces for physical activity, outdoor learning, environmental literacy and engagement with art, while addressing neighborhood flooding issues.

It is a joint venture formed between the MWRD, Chicago Department of Water Management, Chicago Public Schools, Healthy Schools Campaign, and Openlands.

Wadsworth is one of three Space to Grow schools. The two others, Gunsaulus Scholastic Academy in the Brighton Park neighborhood, and Corkery Elementary School in the Little Village neighborhood, were completed in 2016.

"The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago is proud to participate in such an educational investment that imparts a lesson to both students and the community about the importance of stormwater management," said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos. "The project at Wadsworth School will reduce flooding, reduce the load on the combined sewer system, and educate students and neighbors about green infrastructure techniques."

At Wadsworth, designers, landscapers and construction workers took a former 38,000-square-foot play area covered entirely in impervious asphalt and a 2,400-square-foot playground on rubber tiles, and transformed the area into an attractive space for the entire community.

The new and improved play area includes an athletic field with artificial turf, a running track, a basketball court, a playground with poured-in-place rubberized surface, and vegetable gardens donated by The Kitchen Community.

Wadsworth, a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) focused school, plans to use the schoolyard to enhance its STEM curriculum, while exploring new options for gym class and recess and presenting healthy initiatives for the community.

WADSWORTH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S playground following its transformation is pictured above. The new schoolyard at 6650 S. Ellis is constructed of pervious materials. The facility features landscaping that includes trees, shrubs and plants that will retain more than 130,000 gallons of rainwater. It provides community space in addition to space for students' physical activity. The new Wadsworth campus was developed in partnership with the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District and the Space to Grow program which revitalizes Chicago schoolyards.

"Wadsworth is one shining example of the positive impact Space to Grow has on the overall education and quality of life for a community. By lessening the load on our sewer system, we are reducing flooding and also improving area water quality," said MWRD Commissioner Kari Steele. "We are happy to partner on this program and make a difference in educating students and the community about the value of water."

More than 50 percent of the new surface of the schoolyard will be pervious compared to the nearly 100 percent impervious grounds prior to construction.

The campus features a cistern capturing roof runoff, a rain garden capturing runoff from the track and a subsurface aggregate-filled storage area holding stormwater for gradual release to the combined sewer. At least 33 trees, 42 shrubs, and 1788 perennials were planted.