

October 10, 2014

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## **Space to Grow Schoolyard Projects Deliver Vibrant Outdoor Spaces to Chicago Schools and Communities**

*New Schoolyards Include Space for Students and Families to Play and Learn  
while Reducing Neighborhood Flooding*

CHICAGO – Four Chicago elementary schools are receiving new schoolyards this month as part of the *Space to Grow: Greening Chicago Schoolyards* initiative, which transforms crumbling asphalt lots in flood prone neighborhoods into multifaceted “green” schoolyards.

“Space to Grow is a diverse partnership to improve student health by creating exciting outdoor spaces for recess and physical education, and to bring communities together in healthy and active ways,” said Healthy Schools Campaign President and CEO Rochelle Davis. “We know that healthy students are better learners, and it’s imperative that we incorporate student health into all aspects of the school experience, and that literally starts with the school grounds.”

Space to Grow is co-managed by Chicago-based nonprofits Healthy Schools Campaign and Openlands and takes advantage of capital funds from Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the Chicago Department of Water Management (DWM) and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) to turn outdated schoolyards into vibrant outdoor spaces that benefit students and community members while also helping improve the environment.

The new schoolyards include spaces for physical activity, such as turf fields, jogging tracks, basketball and tennis courts, and age-appropriate play equipment. The grounds also feature areas for outdoor learning and exploration, such as outdoor classrooms, native trees and plants, vegetable gardens and art installations. Each schoolyard is designed to include special gardens, permeable surfaces and other landscape features that absorb large amounts of water, which will help reduce neighborhood flooding.

“Space to Grow is an example of the power of what can be accomplished for our communities when multiple partners work together in concert,” said Openlands President and CEO Jerry Adelman. “Instead of looking at the problem of stormwater flooding in Chicago neighborhoods as a single issue to be addressed by one organization or agency, the program seizes the opportunity with dynamic solutions that not only address flooding, but create multiple benefits for students, neighborhoods and natural systems in our city.”

“As the MWRD works to reduce flooding throughout the county, the Space to Grow campaign will help students, teachers and area residents understand the value of stormwater management,” said MWRD Board of Commissioners President Kathleen Therese Meany. “Green infrastructure is important to everyone and is a valuable educational tool.”

Space to Grow pilot schools include: Grissom Elementary School in Chicago’s Hegewisch neighborhood, Leland Elementary School in Austin, Morrill Elementary School in Chicago Lawn, and

Schmid Elementary School in Pullman. Each school was engaged in a months-long planning process during which school staff, students and community members provided a vision for their schoolyard. The schoolyards were then designed and constructed to meet the unique needs and visions of each community. Construction crews broke ground in July at each of the four schools. The projects are scheduled for completion this month.

“Healthy students are better learners, which is why we are committed to providing students access to physical education and activities that promote the healthy foundation all students need for success both in and outside of the classroom,” said CPS CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett. “These play lots will help us expand opportunities for physical education and the amount of time students spend exercising, putting students on a path for a lifetime of health and success.”

### **Community Planting Days and Ribbon Cutting Ceremonies**

Throughout October, Healthy Schools Campaign and Openlands will host community planting days at each of the pilot schools where community volunteers will plant a total of 30,000 bulbs and flowers. The planting days will be followed by ribbon cutting ceremonies to mark the official opening of the schoolyards to students and the community.

This Saturday, October 11, community members and members of the media are invited to attend the community planting day and ribbon cutting ceremony at Morrill Elementary School, located at 6011 S. Rockwell St. in Chicago. Planting will take place from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. with the ribbon cutting ceremony to immediately follow.

To learn more about Space to Grow, including information about upcoming events and volunteer opportunities, go to [spacetogrowchicago.org](http://spacetogrowchicago.org).

### **About Space to Grow: Greening Chicago Schoolyards**

Space to Grow is an innovative program led by Healthy Schools Campaign and Openlands to transform Chicago schoolyards into vibrant outdoor spaces that benefit students, community members and the environment. Schoolyard renovations prioritize physical activity, learning, exploration and community engagement. The green schoolyards also incorporate landscape features that capture a significant amount of rainfall, helping keep the city's water resources clean and resulting in less neighborhood flooding. Space to Grow uses a unique model that brings together capital funds and leadership from Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Department of Water Management, and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago.

### **About Healthy Schools Campaign**

Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to making schools healthier places for all students. HSC believes that health and wellness should be incorporated into every aspect of the school experience. Founded in 2002, HSC advocates for children to have better access to nutritious school food, physical activity, school health resources and clean air to shape their lifelong learning and health. HSC facilitates collaboration between students, parents, teachers, administrators and policymakers to help prepare this diverse group of stakeholders to lead change for healthier schools at the school, district, state and national levels. For more information, go to [healthyschoolscampaign.org](http://healthyschoolscampaign.org).

### **About Openlands**

Founded in 1963, Openlands protects the natural and open spaces of northeastern Illinois and the surrounding region to ensure cleaner air and water, protect natural habitats and wildlife, and help

balance and enrich our lives. Openlands' vision for the region is a landscape that includes a vast network of land and water trails, tree-lined streets, and intimate public gardens within easy reach of every city dweller. It also includes parks and preserves big enough to provide natural habitat and to give visitors a sense of the vast prairies, woodlands, and wetlands that were here before the cities. In sum, Openlands believes that protected open space is critical for the quality of life of our region. For more information, go to [openlands.org](http://openlands.org).

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