



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

Allison Fore

Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Officer

312.751.6626

allison.fore@mwrdd.org

100 East Erie Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611

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## Space to Grow partners win national Green Infrastructure Award

A tremendous partnership continues to make an impact—and receives honors. The collaborative Space to Grow program developed by Openlands, the Healthy Schools Campaign, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD), Chicago Department of Water Management and Chicago Public Schools received the National Association of Flood and Stormwater Management Agencies' (NAFSMA) first place Green Infrastructure award on Aug. 25 in Portland, Oregon.

NAFSMA is an organization of public agencies whose function is the protection of lives, property and economic activity from the adverse impacts of storm and flood waters. The Green Infrastructure award measures the economic and environmental impact of the program as well as the outreach efforts of the program.

The Space to Grow program helps transform Chicago's schoolyards into vibrant outdoor spaces that encourage physical activity, outdoor learning, and community engagement. In addition, Space to Grow also addresses broader environmental concerns like stormwater management and water conservation.

"We are excited to be recognized with this award from the National Association of Flood and Stormwater Management Agencies and happy to bring it home to Chicago," said MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos. "This partnership has instilled the importance of collaborating with our local agencies and organizations to leverage our resources and expertise to make a difference in the lives of many young people and their communities."

The schoolyards use multiple green infrastructure techniques and also include edible gardens, outdoor classrooms, sports fields, basketball courts and play equipment to incorporate outdoor learning, nutrition education, access to healthy foods and encourage physical activity at all schools. To date, six schoolyards have been constructed, and another four are underway.

"These first ten schoolyards are designed with green infrastructure that together can retain over 1.6 million gallons of stormwater on site which keeps runoff out of the sewer system during the heaviest of storms," explained Commissioner Kari Steele.

This impact on stormwater management and creation of new urban green space will contribute to cleaner water, less flooding, fewer combined sewer overflows, reducing the urban heat island effect and enhancing and increasing biodiversity of the region.



*(From L to R): National Association of Flood and Stormwater Management Agencies (NAFSMA) Vice President Steve Fitzgerald presents an award to MWRD Senior Civil Engineer Holly Sauter and MWRD Principal Civil Engineer Jim Yurik with NAFSMA President Timothy Richards looking on. The award recognizes the MWRD and its partners for their work on the Space to Grow program.*

"The contest brought in entries from across the country that included comprehensive communications campaigns as well as individual works, like brochures, posters, public service announcements and government television programs," said Susan Gilson, NAFSMA executive director. "The caliber of work with Green Infrastructure and communication outreach were outstanding and provide great examples of programs that other agencies can modify for their own unique environments."

Space to Grow has already won a number of awards, including the 2016 Best of Green School Award for Collaboration by the Center for Green Schools at the U.S. Green Building Council in collaboration with the Green Schools National Network; the Sustainability award from the Illinois Association for Floodplain and Stormwater Management and a "New Champions" award from the National Physical Activity Plan Alliance. For more information about Space to Grow, visit [www.spacetogrowchicago.org](http://www.spacetogrowchicago.org) or [www.mwrdd.org](http://www.mwrdd.org). A video showcasing all the NAFSMA contest entries will be available on the [www.NAFSMA.org](http://www.NAFSMA.org) website.

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### Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

*Established in 1889, the MWRD ([www.mwrdd.org](http://www.mwrdd.org)) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.*