

Urban Refuge - Morrill School Garden

CULLITON QUINN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE



LOCATION: Chicago, Illinois
CLIENT: Chicago Public Schools

PROJECT TEAM: Chicago Roof Deck; Clarence Davids & Company; G&L Contractors; Openlands; Orsolini Welding Fabricators; Roy Diblik; Wayne Brunzell

Outdoor Space Enriches Students, School, and Neighborhood

Located in the Chicago Lawn neighborhood, Morrill School has a largely Hispanic and African American student body, predominantly from low income families. For some schools, this can create struggles that translate into the classroom. In an effort to combat this, Morrill School worked with nonprofit group Openlands and the design team to create a natural playground for exploration and education but also a refuge for the neighborhood.

A driving force for the design was the existing school mural. Created by Bernard Williams, this art piece depicts strong forms representing ancient cultural art. The design team carried these same bold shapes into the circulation and site amenities, including the outdoor classroom at the south end of the garden that features a stage for formal instruction and lawn for lounging. Donated planter boxes offer space to plant vegetables; a first time experience for many Morrill School students.

Based on the existing asphalt and gravel sub-base, the area required 24" of excavation. This allowed the site to be transformed with some exciting yet functional grade changes. All the water caught onsite flows into a central rain garden; this area has a regulated overflow to prevent any standing water per Chicago Public School requirements. Pedestrian boardwalks are a playful educational tool to engage students in the workings of the rain garden below.

Diversity was the motivating factor for the plant palette at Morrill School, including native grasses, perennials, and sedges. The variety of plants offers seasonal interest; blooms can be seen from spring to late summer, and grasses give structure long into the winter months.

School gardens, like any built landscape, can be challenging to maintain. A watering program has been dutifully enforced with teachers taking shifts to ensure the native plants stabilize in the first couple years. Putting in long hours to plant and tend, the students and staff are very much devoted to the garden's health and longevity. 🌸



BEFORE

