



# Up the Hillside - Lincoln Park High School

CULLITON QUINN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

**Location:** Chicago, Illinois

**Client:** Chicago Public Schools

**Project Team:** A1 Contractors; Bartlett Tree Experts; Christy Webber Landscapes; G&L Contractors; LPHS Principal Michael Boraz; LPHS Biology/Earth Science/Visual Arts Faculty and Students; Midwest Groundcovers; Openlands; Songhay Studios Group

## Outdoor Space Designed for Learning and Interaction

Lincoln Park High School teamed up with Chicago Public Schools and the non-profit organization Openlands Building School Gardens Program to completely re-design an existing amphitheater space no longer being used due to its harsh, aging condition. The school sought to create an outdoor learning and interaction space, but also wanted to create a stronger connection to the nearby park, and showcase their strong school pride.

The outdoor classroom now functions at a much smaller scale than the previous stage and auditorium configuration. Enough seating is provided for one full class, with overflow spaces extending up the hillside. This dynamic arrangement includes concrete steps sculpted into the hillside, Wisconsin Rock River boulders scattered through the expansive lawn, and long seat walls intersecting the rain garden. A local art group assisted students in design of a mosaic mural along the seat wall.

Arranging the seating areas among shade trees allows opportunities to find a cool spot in the shade or soak up sun in colder months. Existing Linden trees were

carefully preserved during construction and were also inter-planted with new native species. Honey Locusts were introduced on the hillside and a Swamp White Oak, well adapted to saturated soils, was planted in the low-lying rain garden. This diversity in plant species supports lessons on environmental conditions, leaf shapes, seasonal quality, and animal habitats.

A primary stakeholder directive was the desire to incorporate a powerful teaching tool into the overall design. The centralized rain garden and native plantings provide this educational experience. Student volunteers planted the garden and their participation is ongoing as they care for and maintain the garden, gaining an understanding of both the beauties and potential struggles associated with a garden in an urban environment.

Throughout the school day, teachers bring classes to the new hillside in order to learn about the natural environment. An exciting respite and meeting place for friends after class, students quickly embraced the new space. The design changed the way the hillside was being used and brought a renewed energy to the school and surrounding community.

