



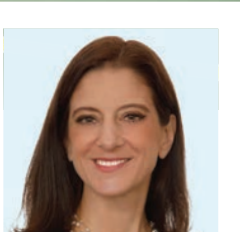
Play Time

Discover how a Brooklyn schoolyard went from a concrete jungle to a green community space.

In collaboration with the Trust for Public Land, Studio Hip has helped transform some 230 asphalt-covered playgrounds into sustainable community spaces over the past 25 years. The schoolyard at P.S. 38 The Pacific School in Brooklyn, which was completed in 2023, is one such transformation. Jennifer Nitzky, ASLA, Studio Hip design principal, shares how the revitalized schoolyard is reducing stormwater impact while giving quality park access to 32,357 residents within a 10-minute walk of the school.

How did the addition of green infrastructure improve the schoolyard’s environmental impact? It’s a large site, so there was a lot of asphalt. We reduced the impervious pavement by about 40 percent, and we used a lot of permeable pavers. We have drainage in aggregate and perforated

PROJECT The Schoolyard at P.S. 38
LOCATION Brooklyn, New York
FIRM Studio Hip



Jennifer Nitzky, ASLA, New York pipes underneath the turf field. Our environmental engineers determined that we needed additional water storage and devised a system of storage tanks underneath the paved kickball court. This green infrastructure manages nearly 1.2 million gallons of stormwater per year, helping to reduce neighborhood flooding and pollution in the nearby Gowanus Canal.

How did you approach planting? Trees were selected to provide quick shade. We used *Ulmus americana* ‘Princeton,’ which grow fast, on the south side of the turf field to create a good-sized canopy. A majority of the plants are native to our region with the addition of a few perennials with long bloom periods. For the learning garden, we created a native

pollinator habitat. Students participated in a planting day to learn about garden stewardship and planting perennials, herbs, and vegetables. The garden storage shed and the gazebo both have green rooftops planted with a durable mix of sedum and perennials.

What role did community engagement play? We use a robust five- to six-week participatory design process where students become the landscape architects. We show students examples of build sites so they see what’s possible. They take notes, record site analysis, keep track of the project timeline, list ideas, and, most importantly, draw their artwork, which is used in the final design. Then they do a site inventory. They look at the shade, sun, slope, drainage, and size. We do a stormwater management and green infrastructure session. Then the students develop wish lists and the entire school votes to create a priority list. Students work in groups to come up with designs, which are then voted on by the school and community. All that input goes into the final design. The students present the final design to the class, principal, and community, and at PTA meetings, so everyone is aware of what the school is going to look like after construction. This hands-on approach creates a strong sense of ownership and pride in their schoolyard. It’s key to the success of the site.

What student-designed elements helped transform the space? The students ultimately selected a jungle theme. Students drew designs related to the theme, like a sloth, toucan, and trees. We traced their artwork in AutoCAD and



Studio Hip transformed P.S. 38’s schoolyard by replacing asphalt with green infrastructure to manage stormwater and improve environmental conditions. The design incorporated native plants, sustainable features, and a jungle-themed playground created through extensive student involvement, fostering community pride and ownership.



our contractor painted the designs onto the asphalt. We also used their designs to create decals that wrapped the stool seats and stage. ♦

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