

An Award-Winning School Garden

The Hugh O'Donnell
Elementary School
East Boston



East Boston has some of the least open space in the City, and so creating a schoolyard that could be used by students and local residents alike was a primary goal when this community came together to build a schoolyard. The O'Donnell Schoolyard Committee partnered with the Neighborhood of Affordable Housing (NOAH), a local community development corporation, which provided one of its seasoned community organizers to facilitate the process. The organizer and the Committee raised money, helped to conduct outreach to residents and worked with the Department of Neighborhoods project manager and the landscape architect to make the schoolyard a reality. The result is a multi-use environment that includes a play structure, a ball court, and an ornamental gate with colorful metal insets based on student designs. And, perhaps because open space is such a premium this part of the City, the schoolyard also includes a school vegetable garden and a perennial garden that frames the school's entrance, as well as a raised map of the Earth, with East Boston as its geographical center.

Parents at the O'Donnell initiated and helped to support a summer program in which volunteers and staff from NOAH and a grassroots group called Boston Urban Gardeners worked with neighborhood youth to learn about vegetables by planting and growing them. Their efforts were so successful that the O'Donnell won a Best School Garden Award from the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, the first time in 100 years that such an award has been presented. And, the landscape architectural firm of Copley/Wolff won a Merit for Institutional Design award from the Boston Society of Landscape Architects for their innovative design.



Schoolyards and Public Art

Schoolyards are unique public spaces. Many schoolyard groups have sought to create "signature" elements in their renovation projects, which highlight the schoolyard's integral connection to the culture of the community at large. The Edward Ingersoll Browne Fund, and others, have played a key role in providing the funds necessary to work with professional artists and landscape architects in creating ornamental gateways, sculptures, art fences and child-inspired graphics which add a distinctive touch to these important neighborhood spaces.