Mary McLeod Bethune Elementary School of Literature and Technology
New Orleans, LA

Mary McLeod Bethune Elementary School of Literature & Technology, located in the Gentilly neighborhood in New Orleans, LA, opened to students in August 2015. The new, 106,000 sf school serves 788 students in grades PreK through 8. Bethune Elementary’s new construction was part of the Recovery School District’s 2011 School Facilities Master Plan for rebuilding public schools in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

The school’s design is organized around a U-shaped plan with central courtyard. Learning spaces (classrooms, labs), located in a 3-story academic wing on the site’s quieter north side, make the most of natural light, and provide views of the playground and courtyard. The main entry, administration and student services, in the school’s center, provide optimum public accessibility. Larger assembly spaces—gym and cafeteria—are located on the opposite, “busy” side of the site with a bus drop-off under existing live oak trees.

Major exterior materials are masonry (face brick, ground-face CMU), pre-finished horizontal 12” metal panels in varying profiles, and an aluminum window system with low-E glass and solar shading on the south. The project achieved its goal of LEED Silver, incorporating cost-effective energy-saving and sustainable design strategies.