The Schools in 2021:
Responses to the MSERA Heritage Volume

The MSERA Heritage Volume contains a chapter [#19] with forecasts of the way schools *might* be in ten years. Contributors include *Harry Chaucer, Silence Dogood, Arne Duncan, Chester E. Finn, Bill Gates, Robert E. Slavin, James Van Patten and Robert E. Wise*.

Following are papers from some respondents in the 2012 symposium at the 41st Annual Meeting of MSERA in Lexington, Kentucky, November 8, 2012.

A follow-up symposium is planned for the 2013 Annual Meeting in Pensacola, Florida that will contain a new set of respondents, with the 2012 panel available for discussion.

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Response to the *Coming Digital Transformation in Education* in the MSERA *Heritage Volume*

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Abstract

In his article, U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, shared insights regarding the *National Educational Technology Plan*. He referenced the transformations in how we interact and conduct business via technology and questioned the lack of change in teaching. Secretary Duncan encouraged educators to ask themselves difficult questions and to explore the fundamental assumptions about how teachers teach, students learn, and schools function. In this article, the author discusses Dr. Duncan's comments and questions the fundamental restructuring of our school systems ahead of large-scale longitudinal data to support the changes.

Response to the *Coming Digital Transformation in Education*

In his article, Secretary Arne Duncan shared insights regarding the *National Educational Technology Plan*. The plan includes five goals for using the potential of technology to transform schools across the nation by 2015.

The first goal pertains to learning and how the educational community engages and empowers students. Through technology learning should become more personalized in both content and student interest. Dr. Duncan commented that, "technology can fundamentally change the learning process" through a better alignment of content and delivery with "students' needs and interests" (p. 148).

The second goal is that of assessment; to measure what matters most at a time when the results may be used to enhance student learning. "These evaluations will go far beyond the end-of-course bubble tests available today and use the latest technologies that give teachers real-time data they need to differentiate instruction and improve student outcomes" (p. 148).

The third and fourth goals are somewhat intertwined; the third goal is that of connection and the fourth goal is to provide the infrastructure to allow those connections.

The fifth goal is for schools to become more productive by, "rethink[ing] basic assumptions and redesign[ing] our educational system" (U.S. Department of Education, p. 12).

It is this author's opinion that, the dominate theme of the *National Educational Technology Plan* is personalized instruction. In Goal 1, educators are asked to "focus what and how we teach to match what people need to know, how they learn, where and when they will learn, and who needs to learn…[to] leverage[s] the power of technology to provide personalized learning" (U.S. Department of Education, p. 8). In Goal 2, teachers will have the "information they need to regularly identify and address students' individual learning needs throughout the year" (Duncan, p. 148). In Goal 3, to use "technology to help build the capacity of educators by enabling a shift to a model of connected teaching…[where] teams of connected educators replace solo practitioners" (U.S. Department of Education, p. 10). In Goal 5, "we must rethink basic assumptions and redesign our education system…to implement personalized learning" (U.S. Department of Education, p. 12). This author finds it ironic that the challenge of *No Child Left Behind* (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001) to ensure that every child achieved led to a culture of *school improvement plans* and *classroom performance*; the shift in focus called for in the *National Education Technology Plan* to personalized instruction would indeed constitute a *transformation in education*. Ultimately, everyone can agree that schools improve as individual students achieve.

The two main points that Secretary Duncan shared were that, "our nation's schools have yet to unleash technology's full potential to transform learning" and that "technology empowers teachers…[yet] technology alone isn't going to improve student achievement" (p. 147). In only 15 years, "technology transformed the way we communicate, the way we socialize, and the way we conduct business. Unfortunately, the last 15 years have not produced a similar transformation in the way teachers teach and the way children learn" (p. 147). He acknowledged that schools are adopting technology and that "we're starting to see progress as virtual schools expand access to curriculum never before available to students. And schools are using data like never before to identify students' specific learning needs" (p. 149). Yet, "we haven't fundamentally restructured the way our schools function" (p. 149).

Dr. Duncan is correct; the radical transformations outlined in the *National Education Technology Plan* have yet to be enacted. When this author began teaching online courses a decade ago, my goal was to determine how to bring the classroom to the online environment. However, this quest was based on a faulty assumption. I should not have assumed that the traditional classroom environment was the best model for learning, by framing the issue in that manner I limited the scope and structure of my online learning environment. Perhaps more educators need to change the question from "how can I bring technology to my classroom," to "how can we use technology to create the best learning environments for all students?" As Dr. Duncan challenged us to, "ask ourselves some hard questions about the tenets that define our

work today. We need to rethink some basic assumptions about the use of time, the structure of the school day, and how we organize our students…" (p. 149).

Some changes have occurred at both the classroom and school level in many of our nation's schools. Communication, in many classrooms, now involves teachers emailing students and parents and posting lessons and assignments online. Mathematics labs are exemplars of teachers using real-time-data to monitor and adjust the curriculum for individual students as they progress through the content. Examples of more radical restructuring include, year round schooling, block scheduling, charter schools, and online courses and degree programs at both the post-secondary and secondary levels. Radical changes to our nation's education system have not kept pace with the changes experienced in our personal communications, socialization, and business; however, is it feasible and appropriate for us to dismantle and rebuild our educational system at the same rate that technology changes? Perhaps the pace of change to our educational system could be accelerated; however, the system should not be changed without large-scale longitudinal data to support the decisions.

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Schools in 2021: Keeping the Promise

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For months I'd heard the rumors. At first, it was just hushed whispers spoken under cover of darkness in empty hallways, in deserted parking garages, and behind closed doors. I knew something subversive was up but could only piece together bits of words, parts of sentences. Just enough to know that whatever it was had raised hope... Then one day…It isn't a legend. It's real. I've seen it…It's one of those public 'private' schools right--…Wrong…it's in a working-class neighborhood with high mobility rates, single-parent families, and high unemployment rates…only a few years ago…the school had only a 60% proficiency rate. Now their fifth-graders score 100%...Sure there are things I don't have to see to believe, things I easily accept on faith – like the Sun will come up tomorrow, the Earth revolves around the Sun, and somewhere just south of Memphis, Elvis is enjoying a fried peanut butter and banana sandwich. But this? Soon, feeling like Indiana Jones searching for the Holy Grail, I donned my figurative fedora, climbed into my Jeep, and stealthily headed out in search of my Holy Grail…Walking toward the building [the principal and I talked] causally. Everything seemed so normal…. Immediately, I knew everything was not normal, at least not normal for the way most schools operate…This was a place **about and for** children…[The principal] explained that the school's instruction is highly individualized, hands-on, and driven by formative assessment…we really know the research…and use that research to create child-centered learning environments. At the end of the day, I shook [the principal's] hand, swung open the door, and walked into the sun. Smiling to myself, I thought, "Sleeper cells. All around the country there are sleeper cells like this one in this unexpected place. And when NCLB is gone – and it will be gone – they will be ready to lead us forward into a way of teaching and learning that makes sense." And what I respected the most … was that the staff had found the key to beating the twisted reform that is No Child Left Behind. They had figured it out. . . . And once they understood it, they twisted NCLB rather than allowing NCLB to twist them and their kids. Wow." (Starnes, 2007, pp. 314-15, emphasis added.)

I chose the title "Keeping the Promise" because there is so much potential if we as the adults will take responsibility for it. My vision of the promise is informed by my reading of Finn,

Slavin, Duncan, Wise, Gates, and Chaucer in *The Heritage Volume of the Mid-South Educational Research Association*.

Here are highlights from my reading:

⌧ **Slavin** (p. 142) – In education, however, the classroom of 2011 is not so different from that of 1961.

⌧ **Duncan** (p. 147) – We need to leverage technology's promise to improve learning. (p. 149) - Schools are using data like never before to identify students' specific learning needs. But we haven't fundamentally restructured the way our schools function. We need to *stop,* take a step back, and ask ourselves some hard questions about the tenets that define our work today. We need to rethink some basic assumptions about the use of time, the structure of the school day, and how we organize our students in their learning environment. We need to move from measuring seat time to measuring competency. (Emphasis added.)

⌧ **Gates** (p. 153) – One of the most expensive assumptions embedded in school budgets is the belief that reducing class sizes improves student achievement.…We've gone from a student-teacher ratio of 26:1 in 1960 – to 15:1 today.

Chaucer, however, was the writer who gave substance to how we might need to start. He identifies six expectations in the next ten years.
1. Individualized, yet with a strong senses of community
2. Technology
3. Questions and difficult problems Schools in 2021: Keeping the Promise 4
4. Micro-neurosurgeons
5. Democratic principles
6. Special Education and learning

   I would challenge Slavin that we can take some of our 1960's education while moving truly into 21st century education. Let's start with – individualized, yet with a strong sense of community. Think back to an era when teachers knew their students, not just the students' names. Think about when the school really cared about having parent involvement, not just on school designated afternoons or evenings. Chaucer writes about students having academic coaches and "these coaches will know the student and her family for many years" (p. 154).

   He talks about technology based on how children interact with technology and learning, rather than adult models. How many of you use cell phones to poll students in your classes or ask them to tweet? *U.S. News* (October 29, 2012) reported on a Michigan State University study

indicating "that courses that engage students on Twitter may actually see higher interaction and better grades…students who were actively engaging with classmates and instructor on Twitter were more interested in course material – and ultimately received higher grades." The study concluded "that students who use Twitter for academic reasons gain the ability to write succinctly, stay up to date on current research, and also benefit from connecting with academic experts directly."

Chaucer writes, "There will be a reversal in the traditional view of information accumulation leading to eventual synthesis. Instead, students will learn to begin with highly provocative questions and difficult problems" (p. 155). Think about the power of asking "why" in research, then think how we deliver information in classes. He talks about students leaning as "important and participatory rather than passive and preparatory" (p. 155).

Think about this statement, "Teachers will see themselves as micro−neurosurgeons as they engage students in learning." And what would be the implications for respect if teachers were recognized as "the most important people in our society in that they carry out John Dewey's mission of 'conserving, transmitting, rectifying and expanding the heritage of values' that we received from the previous generation." (p. 155).

Chaucer talks about students practicing democratic principles at all grade levels, so they can actually learn how to be engaged citizens. The recent elections have shown that younger people want to be involved in the democratic process. According to one news report the day after the elections, younger people ages 18−29 voted in historic numbers.

As a special educator, I am especially drawn to Chaucer's description of special education and learning having "progressed to the point where we will have to revise our assumptions about what all kids can learn" (p. 156). He concludes the paragraph with a particularly strong statement: "We will not waste human potential in expensive incarceration. Instead, we will invest heavily in early childhood education, early intervention, day care, and social support, particularly for those with social and economic disadvantages. Society will view human beings as the planet's greatest resource" (p. 156).

We need to keep the promise that all kids can learn. We need to move from structures of the past – one teacher, one classroom, one group of students for a set amount of time whether it be a day or an hour. We need to expend the energy needed to twist our thinking. We've reduced physical activity because we need to spend more time on academics, yet, kids have energy and we are facing a childhood obesity epidemic. We have taken arts and music out of schools so we can spend more time on academics, yet how do we expose them to different media to learn appreciation or at least tolerance?

We forget to ask children to clean up classrooms, their areas, places they inhabit six to seven or more hours a day, yet expect they'll take care of the environment. We need to keep the promise that we as adults can help them along a path that will give them future opportunities. I think the six points above are a good start.

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Teachers' Visions of Schools in 2021

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Chapter 19 of *The MSERA Heritage Volume* (2011) addressed opinions by business leaders such as Bill Gates and educational experts such as Arne Duncan, Robert Slavin and others regarding what the future of education would look like for the USA in the year 2021. The present paper addresses responses to some pertinent comments voiced by James VanPatten of Florida Atlantic University.

In the article "Education 2021," VanPatten proposed a scenario of possibilities for education in the year 2021. The present paper will address only a few of the predictions that VanPatten made. One assertion was that vouchers, charter schools, online learning, and private schools would abound, giving parents a plethora of choices for educating their children. He foresaw high schools in particular as offering half of their courses online and envisioned blended learning (part online, part face-to-face in a traditional classroom) as a definite trend for the future. Of course, in a world of exponentially advancing technological inventions, many of which have not been invented yet, he visualized some devices that do exist today such as video conferencing and virtual field trips as well as e-book readers, smart phones, ipads, and social media outlets as part of the fabric of education in the future. Another prognostication was that parental involvement would be required and that schools would have to coach parents on how to help their children prepare for school at an early age. Another possibility he offered was that public school would no longer be free and that wealthier parents would pay tuition while lower income families would be exempt.

Similarly, Cronin (2010) wrote about a vision of the future of education in the year 2020 and speculated that charter schools and private schools would abound and that home schooling would become the preferred mode of education for millions of students, in part because of the proliferation of online learning and virtual schools.

In contrast, the most common issues predicted by the Chief State School Officers (CSSOs) for education in 2020 included the following: (1) utilization of technology in instruction; (2) student preparation for the workplace; and (3) preschool and early childhood education (Morgan, Matranga, Peltier, & Hill, 1998).

A recent conversation I had with my sister, a former associate superintendent in south Louisiana, is noteworthy. She asserted that the achievement gap has continued to widen between white and minority children despite attempts such as Head Start to prepare minority children at

an early age for school. She predicted that, even though many schools, public and private, now offer pre-school as an option, formal education will eventually be mandatory at two years old. Furthermore, minority parents will have to be trained in how they might prepare their babies and toddlers for formal schooling and how they might reinforce education at home.

The present paper will address the vision of the future of education as visualized by current 2012 classroom teachers who are enrolled in a principal preparation master's degree program in educational leadership at a university in southeast Louisiana.

Students read VanPatten's article and responded to the section regarding the proliferation of school choices available to parents (charter and private schools as well as virtual and online learning). Their assignment was to suggest a method of adaptation for their respective schools through establishing a niche that made their particular school unique so as to ensure continual student enrollment. Suggestions included the following:

- Service-learning school that educates students through community service outreach programs

- Work/study school with industry-based certification in specific work force jobs

- Technological bi-lingual school with blended learning

- Specialized subject-area or age-level school without requiring standardized testing

- "Green" school with recycling, hands-on organic gardening, alternative energy, and ubiquitous free wi-fi

- Business-sponsored school to allow for career-directed training and certification

- Math-specialty school to prepare students for professions such as engineering that require in-depth knowledge of mathematics

- School offering career certifications in technology and construction fields

Another activity involved small groups of students visualizing what their schools might look like ten years from now. Some of the prompts for them to reflect upon included learning spaces, method of learning, interaction of teacher and students, involvement of community, and technology. Visions included the following:

- Student-driven learning with teacher as facilitator

- More access to personal technology for use in instruction along with instant messaging and technological communication

- Expansion of learning spaces to include real world environment, community with hands-on learning experiences

- Classroom desktops which operate like ipads

- Each student's space with electronic device and Internet access

- Virtual schools (like Second Life), online learning, blended learning, Skype, Blackboard or Moodle, united streaming, anytime/anywhere learning

- Textbooks online and/or downloaded to ebooks

- Every classroom equipped with science and computer labs already built in

- Immediate feedback from teachers during testing/assignments through electronic programs

- Students learning at own pace, challenging/teaching one another

- Interactive classrooms linked to classrooms in various countries to allow children to learn about and alongside different ethnicities and cultures

- Network of teachers and classrooms throughout USA promoting sharing of resources and allowing a teacher with expertise in a certain field to teach various classrooms throughout the network

- Parents forced to be more involved because of dramatic decrease in contact between schools and students

- Lack of direct teacher involvement with students leading to lower quality education

Despite all the technological advances in the world and in education, several predicted the following:

- Classrooms will look the same as they do now with very little change

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Response to James VanPatten's Article in The Heritage Volume of MSERA: The Nationalization/ Internationalization of Standards

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VanPatten (2011) stated:

> …Although controversial, to achieve measurable achievement results there will be national common standards in language, math, science, and technology. The National Association of Governors will continue to lead in efforts to improve learning outcomes for all students…. (p. 157).

This paper explores three aspects:

   (1) the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in ELA and mathematics;
   (2) from state standards to CCSS;
   (3) assessments aligned with CCSS.

The CCSS in ELA and Mathematics

Rothman (August, 2012) suggested that the CCSS are not named national standards because of past political controversies:

> …Congress also killed a proposed federal agency that was intended to certify national and state standards….The agency, known as the National Education Standards Improvement Council (NESIC) had been created by a 1994 law that provided grants to states to set standards… when Republicans took over Congress in 1995, they abolished NESIC before members had even been appointed…(p. 5).

Rothman traced policy from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that required participation in the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). Other influences toward national standards were Friedman's (2005) book and illumination of U.S performance on international assessments with focus on Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Table 1 below presents international assessments; the U.S. was the only participating country that did not have national standards (NAEP and the Common Core Standards, January, 2011).

Table 1. International Assessments

Study	What's assessed?	Who's assessed?	Who's surveyed?	What years?
Progress in International Reading literacy Study	Reading literacy	4th-graders	Students, Teachers, Principals	2001, 2006, 2011, 2016
Program for International Student Assessment	Reading literacy, Mathematics literacy, Science literacy	15-year-olds	Students, Principals	2000, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015
Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study	Mathematics, Science	4th-graders, 8th-graders	Students, Teachers, Principals	1995, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015

The search criteria produced no results, please try again.
(International Activities Programs, 2012).

From State Standards to CCSS

The CCSS in ELA and mathematics were developed using international benchmarks under the supervision the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association. (Rothman, August, 2012). NAEP and the Common Core Standards (January, 2011) described the CCSS as "higher and fewer in number" than state standards. Porter, McMaken, Hwang, and Yang (April, 2011) described alignment of state standards and CCSS in mathematics:

> …For mathematics then, the Common Core standards represent a modest shift toward higher levels of cognitive demand than are currently represented in state standards. Of course, state standards vary considerably, co these differences would vary across states…..There is a huge difference in the emphasis on instructional technology (e.g., calculator use); in the state standards, nearly 26% of content is on instructional technology, compared with none in the Common Core standards…(p. 106)..

Porter et al. examined international benchmarking comparing CCSS for 8th-grade mathematics with 8th-grade mathematics standards for Finland, Japan, and Singapore—all three countries have higher mathematics achievement than the U.S. Alignments of the 8th grade mathematics standards with the U.S. CCSS were: Finland .21, Japan .17, and Singapore .13.

> Porter et al. (April, 2011) stated:
>> …The content differences that lead to these low levels of alignment for cognitive demand are, for all three countries, a much greater emphasis on "perform

procedures" than found in the U.S. Common Core standards. For each country, approximately 75% of the content involves "perform procedures," whereas in the Common Core standards, the percentage for procedures is 38%. Differences for the other five levels of cognitive demand are not uniform across countries….Clearly, these three benchmarking countries with high student achievement do not have standards that emphasize higher levels of cognitive demand than does the Common Core…(pp. 113-114)

Aligning CCSS with a national assessment may mean an aligned national curriculum. Will international curriculum alignment be a goal? Perhaps the standards and curricula of Finland, Japan, and Singapore are more closely aligned with the international assessments? Buckey (2012) NCES Commissioner, stated at the NAEP SIG meeting that the NAEP budget had been cut at the same time funds were budgeted for participation in international assessments at the state level.

Assessments aligned with the CCSS

NAEP has been called the "Nation's Report Card." The NCLB required Title 1-funded states to participate in NAEP. Porter, et al. (April, 2011) compared CCSS alignment with state and NAEP assessments:

> …Another question we sought to answer is the degree to which NAEP assessments align with the Common Core standards…. Alignment indices were calculated for NAEP assessments for Grades 4 and 8. In math, NAEP's alignment with the Common Core standards was .28 for fourth grade and .21 for eighth grade. Core standards was .20 in both grades. Thus the NAEP's alignment with the Common Core math standards is significantly higher than the average of state assessments only in fourth grade. In ELAR, however, NAEP has a higher alignment than the average of state assessments in both fourth and eighth grades. NAEP's alignment to the Common Core standards is .25 in fourth grade and .24 in eighth grade, compared with an average alignment of .17 for state assessments in both grades….(pp. 109-110).

State consortia are developing assessments aligned with the CCSS. In Kentucky, universities are encouraged to align course syllabi and assessments with CCSS. Rothman (August, 2012) identified obstacles to alignment of CCSS, national assessments, and P-20 curriculum. One of the obstacles was turnover of governors and state education chiefs.

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The Gap Between Silence Dogood's *2021 School Tour* and K-12 Schools in 2012

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Silence Dogood described her 2021 visit to a public school in Mississippi in the MSERA Heritage volume (2011). This paper documents the notable differences between Dogood's report and public schools in 2012. The funding model in 2021 is one of two the most distinct of the differences. By 2021 schools were funded by a value-added tax and not a property tax. An addition to schools that is not present in 2012 is the robot that is able to determine the social/ emotional state of students and make amendments accordingly. Other services and opportunities found in 2021 are available to many public schools in 2012, such as free and pervasive WiFi access, service learning, and ecological awareness. The differences are usually related to funding and resource challenges.

Notable Differences Between School Visits in 2012 and Silence Dogood's 2021 School Visit

In 2012	Notable Differences in 2021 School Visit
Most schools start around Labor Day	Students enter twice a year rather than the annual 'first day of school.'
Each state has its own formula that includes a mixture of state and local taxes per school district. The lion's share of the burden falls on the local area known as property value and school district taxes. In this author's place of residence, there is a property tax and school district tax.	Schools paid through a value added tax and not property values

Free Wifi is becoming more common in wealthy districts. For example, Norfolk public schools, Manhasset High School, Palo Alto High School, and Concord Community and Elementary Schools document the availability on their websites. However, in rural and some large urban districts, the lack of updated technology and maintenance resources make this impossible.	Free Wifi for all students and staff in the building.
In 2012, most states are embracing the common core curriculum for math and language arts. Science common curriculum is delayed but being finalized. It is unclear whether there can be a common core Science curriculum by 2021.	Common curriculum that allows students who move frequently to maintain academic growth.
Though there is more awareness of the needs for Social Emotional development, there is no funding allocated for the efforts in most schools today.	Social Emotional Needs recognized and tracked with robots
All Maryland High Schools, Montgomery County Public Schools, Chicago Public Schools, Seattle Public Schools, Broward County Public Schools, and Baltimore City Schools describe a required service learning component in their graduation requirements. Many more are not listed here.	Students involved in service learning
In some schools, the importance for students to be proficient in art and music is documented on school websites (Grand Haven Area Public Schools, Madison County Public Schools, and Wyoming City Schools). Rural and urban schools' funding challenges have caused many schools to cease funding for the arts. Sports participation has fallen on the parents' responsibility in many districts.	Not only sports but arts are emphasized as well

Foreign language options are provided in numerous districts such as Ashland School District, Forest Grove School District, Pasadena Unified School District, Capistrano Unified School District, Austin Independent School District, Blaine County School District, and Cambridge Public School District. Funding challenges have caused many districts to have a second language as a before or after school activity that is funded by parents.	All students have a second language
On the school websites for the Washington, DC schools and the Celina City Schools in Ohio, there are statements that describe collaboration with locals regarding food and health. Individual schools work with locals to provide healthy alternatives and to provide students the opportunity to participate in local food and health businesses. Schools with lower funding and staffing opportunities do not have the resources to embrace this concept.	Collaborative with locals regarding food and health
Numerous schools throughout the country have embraced green environments in the building of new schools and in the everyday operations. Websites for the following schools document their efforts of being green conscious: Evergreen Community Charter School, Mercy High School, Benjamin School District 25, Shorewood School District, Radnor Township School District, and West Milton, Ohio.	Building and operations are green conscious

A summary review of the differences noted in the table above indicates that schools in 2012 are able to provide learning environments that reflect some of the 2021 school visit findings, but not all. A determining factor in each case is the available funding. The era of accountability has contributed to the continuation of disparate schooling opportunities based on local laws and economy.