

A Look Back: It is 1990. Imagine this school

- The basement classrooms are damp, and have old, dirty carpets wall to wall.
- Whenever it rains, water leaks in around the old windows, providing a home for mould growth inside the walls. Buckets catch leaks in the halls.
- The windows themselves have been screwed shut for fear of vandalism.
- It is routine to replace old asbestos floor tiles by moving the class to one side of the room while the workers break up and remove tiles and glue down the new ones. Then all are moved to the other side to finish the job. (In one example, with windows screwed shut, three workers went home sick. One child's health has never been the same.)
- There is a smell of sewer gas from the old locker room that was closed a few years ago.
- The curtains have been up for 25 years but have never been washed.
- When the sun shines it is too hot, and on cold days the children wear their coats.
- The forced air radiators have never been cleaned.
- The custodian uses petroleum mop oil to remove dust from floors.
- Floors are waxed and buffed during class time.
- The photocopier and laminator sit next to the secretary's desk, without ventilation.
- In the washrooms, there are chemical deodorizers that contain neurotoxins.
- Cleaning materials contain endocrine disruptors, carcinogens, mutagens, sensitizers, and teratogens.
- There are visible black mould and water stains on ceiling tiles.
- Mould growth is covered by pushing the ceiling tile up out of sight with a new one. In one school we found 7 layers of black, mouldy tiles above the T-bar.
- In another a new drop-ceiling is built in a gymnasium to cover the mould. In another, new basement walls are installed inside the mouldy ones.
- Asbestos-covered pipes have exposed, worn, ratty areas.
- When asbestos is removed, workers wear suits and respirators while children sit nearby.
- Fluorescent lights are flickering and many don't have covers.
- Many of these lights have old PCB-bearing ballasts.
- Halls and classrooms are painted with standard VOC-bearing paints when school is in session.
- Roofs are tarred and yards are paved while school is in session.
- Ground crews bring lawnmowers inside to refill the tanks to avoid burning the grass.
- The oil delivery truck leaks oil as it passes the entrance. Children run through the oil at recess.
- Combustion fumes enter the school from the furnace room.
- A school's brick façade is being repointed. Silica/cement dust encircles the school. Children cover their heads with their coats to enter or leave. Dust is over everything inside. Computers stop working well. Children play under the worker's staging at recess and noon hour.
- When new schools open, children and staff report asthma, headaches, nose bleeds, rashes, losing consciousness, brain fog, and many other symptoms. One or two are taken to hospital in ambulance. Some have their health permanently changed.
- Gymnasium floors are refinished during the school year. Some students and staff go home and don't return for days or longer.
- When the annual ant problem begins, the pest company sprays the perimeter of the school, and pesticide drifts in through the open windows over the children's desks.
- Only a few schools have Occupational Health and Safety Committees although they are legally required for all workplaces.

This list goes on. These were normal conditions in our province's schools. Children's well-being and learning ability were being affected. Staff who spent their careers in these buildings were often suffering from related health issues. It would be interesting to recount the cases in detail, the names and lives, and how each change was wrought, but that would require writing a book. Link to <https://casle.ca/about-us/> to read more about what changed in schools and some of the reasons why.