I'm Michelle Waite, trustee and board chairperson for the board of education for school district no. 71, Comox Valley.

On behalf of our district, we sincerely appreciate the opportunity to present to the committee today. Thank you for the government's continued recognition of the importance of public education. We have noted the increases to capital funding, per-student funding and the additional mental health, food and affordability grants. These increases certainly help the sector achieve the Education and Child Care Minister's mandate. However, what is essential is long-term, predictable, sustained funding.

Today, I'm going to touch on two areas of our sector's mandate, child care and climate change, and requests related to the cost pressures of a growing district.

Child care. Our district values and understands the importance of child care and school connection. While we acknowledge per-student funding rates were adjusted for negotiated labour settlements, one of the challenges we face is there was no specific funding for operating cost escalation or operating funds for child care centres.

With the addition of child care to the education mandate, the ministry and government are asking districts to take on an unfunded mandate or to spend educational-focused funds, which is a barrier to creating and expanding much-needed child care spaces in our district, as districts just cannot stretch the current K to 12 funding any further to include 0 to 12.

Recommendation 1 is that the Ministry of Education and Child Care engage districts in a collaborative conversation discussing operational challenges associated with child care facilities within the education sector.

Portables. Global cost escalations and demographic changes in B.C. have put additional budget challenges on our growing district. Our schools are already nearing capacity with over 50 portables in service — let alone the significant growth projected in the next ten years.

This issue is two-fold: the use of portables and the cost of each portable at $350,000, which are only allowed to be funded from operating dollars. Portables do not provide many positives in terms of learning and teaching environments. You may have heard some of this already from some of the larger growing districts. In terms of the per-student capita ratio, Comox Valley schools currently have more students in portables than Surrey schools.

We have projected an additional 2,000 students, which means 30 more portables at a cost of over $10 million. We either need five additional elementary schools and one high school or access to funding for modular or a combination of the two.

The second recommendation is to consider, as a first step, adding a new capital fund for portable classrooms similar to the bus purchase program.

Next, greenhouse gas emission reductions. Our board of education's current strategic plan includes a goal of fostering environmental stewardship and an action plan of reducing carbon emissions and the district's environmental footprint.

Districts need help electrifying schools and switching to heat pumps — sounds like a bit of a common theme today. This is the most significant act we can take to lower our greenhouse gases. Our direct funding from government for carbon-neutral projects per year is approximately $350, 000/year

The cost to electrify and change one school to heat pump ranges from $750,000 to $2.2 million per school, and we have 22 schools.

Our third recommendation is to consider funding additional resources in districts to support operationalizing the provincial government's mandate by increasing the available envelope for projects in the carbon neutral capital plan.

Under the School Act, trustees are responsible for the improvement of student achievement, full stop. Each of these issues today and many others create the push-pull for boards of education and their school districts as we all strive to balance the many competing and important issues surrounding education of our students and awareness of the world around us. Thank you.

M. Starchuk (Chair): Thank you for your presentation, Michelle. Tom.

T. Shypitka: Thanks. Thanks for the presentation, Michelle.
First of all, it's good that you identified that the operational costs for portables come from operational costs, not from capital costs. It's kind of something I asked right at the beginning. It went from a school district that said, "We don't know." The last one says, "I think its operational," now to you saying it is. So it's good that we've identified. That's a huge draw.
What is…. The person before me…. We were talking about power consumption for heat pumps, and I identified it's about 36 kilowatt hours per day for residents on average. What is it…? You probably don't know this, but maybe you can take this back. What is the power draw for a school? I would like to know that. If you can find that out for me, that would be great.

M. Waite: I have a great document that somewhere in it might have it, but not within the five-minute Q&A that we were offered the opportunity to have.

T. Shypitka: I didn't expect it, but if you could send that to us, that would be great.

H. Yao: Thank you so much. I'm just trying to wrap around my head all the asks you have so far. So far, you have about 50 portables at about $350,000 each. You're expecting an additional ten needed. Is that correct?

M. Waite: We're…. Hang on. We need an additional 30.

H. Yao: Sorry, I apologize. I remember that now. In order for us to replace it…. You mentioned five elementary schools.

M. Waite: With the additional 2,000 students with the current portables that we already have on site currently, to move all of our students out of portables and into the bricks-and-mortar schools or the traditional school layouts, our community would need an additional five elementary schools when we have those additional 2,000 students plus a high school.

M. Starchuk (Chair): Michelle, on that note, what would you consider the enrolment in a traditional elementary and high school?

M. Waite: Per school?

M. Starchuk (Chair): Yes.

M. Waite: It all depends on when the school was built.

M. Starchuk (Chair): I mean moving forward.

M. Waite: I don't have the answer to that question. I'm happy to try to find that out, but I don't know the answer.

R. Leonard: Nice to see you, Michelle. Thanks very much for your presentation. It's interesting to hear. You've really articulated some of the challenges that you're having to providing things like readily accessible child care and also creating learning environments that we really need to see for our future workers of British Columbia. Thank you for those things, especially to bring it home to what it looks like on the ground.
The notion…. It's astronomical, the costs that you're talking about for climate action to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions.

[10:10 a.m.]

Do you see an advantage perhaps of more collaboration to look at…? Maybe heat pumps aren't the way. Maybe it's going to be community heating systems, geothermal, something like that where you're able to collaborate and partner with others to achieve the outcomes that we need, but more cost-effectively.
M. Waite: I'm not

pumps aren't the way. Maybe it's going to be community heating systems, geothermal, something like that, that you're able to collaborate and partner with others to achieve the outcomes that we need but in a more cost-effective way.

M. Waite: I'm not near an expert of probably any of the other presenters that you will have heard over your time going through communities. I think maybe one of the challenges or one of the pieces is where our schools are located and what they're connected to. I've heard there may be opportunity depending on where a school is located, I would say, urban versus rural or if it's next to a facility that may be off-putting heat that a school could take on. I know that there's been discussion about that. I don't know what the answer is.
Our challenge is that as we reach the important goal of reducing the greenhouse gas markers and the costs to organizations to offset their greenhouse gases through dollars, we're then giving back funding that we could utilize or that could be reallocated. It feels like it's a no win. We don't have the money to do the important work that needs to be done and then the money coming out because we haven't done the work. How can we find that solution, recognizing for a district our size the 22 schools and how much it costs — maybe not for all of them, depending on where they're located, but certainly for many of them —because they're stand-alone in a neighbourhood or in a rural environment?

M. Starchuk (Chair): Michelle, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.