

To: Athens Grafton School Board
From: Dave Younce
Date: June 17, 2026
Re: Grafton Elementary School Study Update

Athens Grafton School Board Members,

This update memo covers the work completed so far and the themes that are starting to emerge. These are not yet official findings. Data collection and stakeholder engagement are still underway, and a fuller update will follow.

Work Completed

- Reviewed enrollment history and projections
- Reviewed staffing levels, organizational structure, and operational practices
- Reviewed available budget and financial information
- Conducted an initial review of student achievement and growth data
- Interviewed school board members and community stakeholders individually
- Interviewed school staff individually
- Spent a full day on site at Grafton Elementary School: classroom observations, staff interviews, observation of school culture and operations
- Began outreach and planning for broader stakeholder engagement

Emerging Themes

School Culture The school's culture is its strongest asset. Staff, parents, and community members describe it the same way: welcoming, supportive, family-oriented. I saw it firsthand during the site visit. Relationships between staff and students are very positive and collaborative. Student behavior is strong. Relationships among staff are very strong. The commitment to supporting kids is real.

Enrollment and Scale Enrollment has dropped significantly and is projected to stay flat. This is the concern raised most often, by far. "We need more students" came up in nearly every interview. Stakeholders tie current enrollment to peer interaction, instructional grouping, extracurricular access, and the overall experience kids get at school. People absolutely support the school. They also recognize its current size creates problems that get harder to solve the smaller it gets.

Community Identity For many Grafton residents in particular, the school is more than just a school. It is tied to community identity and local history. That will continue to be a part of the conversation throughout the study.

Community Perceptions Perceptions of the school vary depending on who you ask. Staff and describe a very positive experience. Other views seem shaped by history: including leadership turnover and limited recent contact with the current program. This requires more analysis.

Student Outcomes Initial achievement and growth data do not point to a performance crisis necessarily. But, the real question is whether continued enrollment decline and current levels place the educational model, peer interactions, and academic opportunities at risk.

Questions Guiding the Study at this Stage

- What educational opportunities should students be able to count on going forward?
- How does school size affect student experience, programming, and peer interaction?
- What matters most to students, families, and the community about the current school experience?
- What enrollment level does it take to sustain the current model?
- What options exist to keep what works while addressing what does not?

Next Steps

- Finish the achievement and growth data analysis
- Finish the financial and operational review
- Meet with municipal leadership in both communities
- Continue stakeholder engagement
- Build a findings framework for the Board
- Keep evaluating future pathways and what they mean

A fuller update will follow once analysis and stakeholder engagement are further along.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dave Younce