

Don't Close Ephesus Elementary



A Data-Driven Case for Keeping Our Neighborhood School Open

Submitted to the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools Board of Education

January 2026

#4

ACADEMIC GROWTH
("EXCEEDED" STATUS)

98%

STUDENTS FOLLOW RULES
(+29 PTS VS DISTRICT)

0

VIOLENCE THREATS
(NC TEACHER SURVEY)

Key Finding: Ephesus Elementary is not a problem to be solved—it is a strategic asset for the district's future. Ephesus ranks **among the top 4** in academic growth, serves a diverse Title I population, and is positioned for growth with significant housing development nearby.

Executive Summary

The Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools district faces difficult budget decisions. However, closing Ephesus Elementary would be a short-sighted choice that contradicts the district's stated goals for equity, sustainability, and community engagement.

This report demonstrates that Ephesus Elementary:

- **Ranks among top performers in academic growth** - 4th of 11 elementary schools with "Exceeded" status
- **Has exceptional school climate** - 98% of teachers report students follow rules (+29 pts above district)¹⁶
- **Is a walkable neighborhood school** with 99 students walking to school*
- **Serves a diverse, high-need population** as a Title I school (30-36% FRL, 50% minority)
- **Has significant housing development nearby** - 563 units (149 affordable + 414 market-rate)

Recommendation

The Board should **keep Ephesus Elementary open** and recognize it as a model neighborhood school that exemplifies the district's values.

*Parent-reported figure. Data marked with * indicates parent-supplied information.

Academic Excellence

Ephesus Elementary achieved the 4th highest academic growth in the district. With a growth score of 85.8, Ephesus earned "Exceeded Expectations" status—demonstrating that our students and teachers are succeeding.

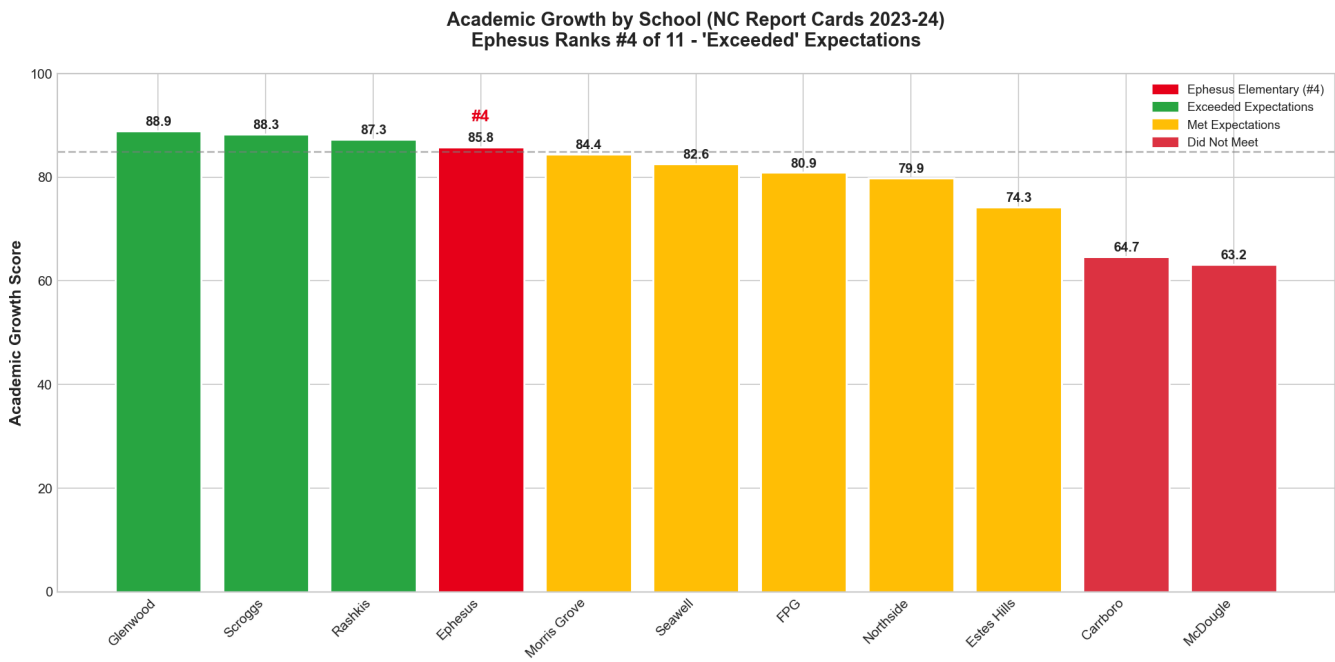


Figure 1: Academic growth scores by school (NC Report Cards 2023-24). Ephesus ranks #4 of 11.

Verified Academic Data (All 11 Schools)²

Rank	School	Growth Score	Status
1	Glenwood	88.9	Exceeded
2	Scroggs	88.3	Exceeded
3	Rashkis	87.3	Exceeded
4	Ephesus	85.8	Exceeded
5	Morris Grove	84.4	Met

6	Seawell	82.6	Met
7	FPG	80.9	Met
8	Northside	79.9	Met
9	Estes Hills	74.3	Met
10	Carrboro	64.7	Did Not Meet
11	McDougle	63.2	Did Not Meet

What Makes Ephesus Successful

- **Exceptional school culture:** 98% of teachers report students follow conduct rules—29 points above district average¹⁶
- **Community engagement:** 98% of teachers say parents know what's going on at school (+13 pts vs district)¹⁶
- **Experienced faculty:** 98% say Ephesus is a good place to work and learn¹⁶
- **Equity focus:** Title I resources effectively serving diverse learners

Sources: NC School Report Cards², NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey 2024¹⁶

School Climate & Safety

The 2024 NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey confirms what families already know: Ephesus has an exceptional school climate with student behavior metrics far exceeding district averages.

Student Behavior: 29 Points Above District¹⁶

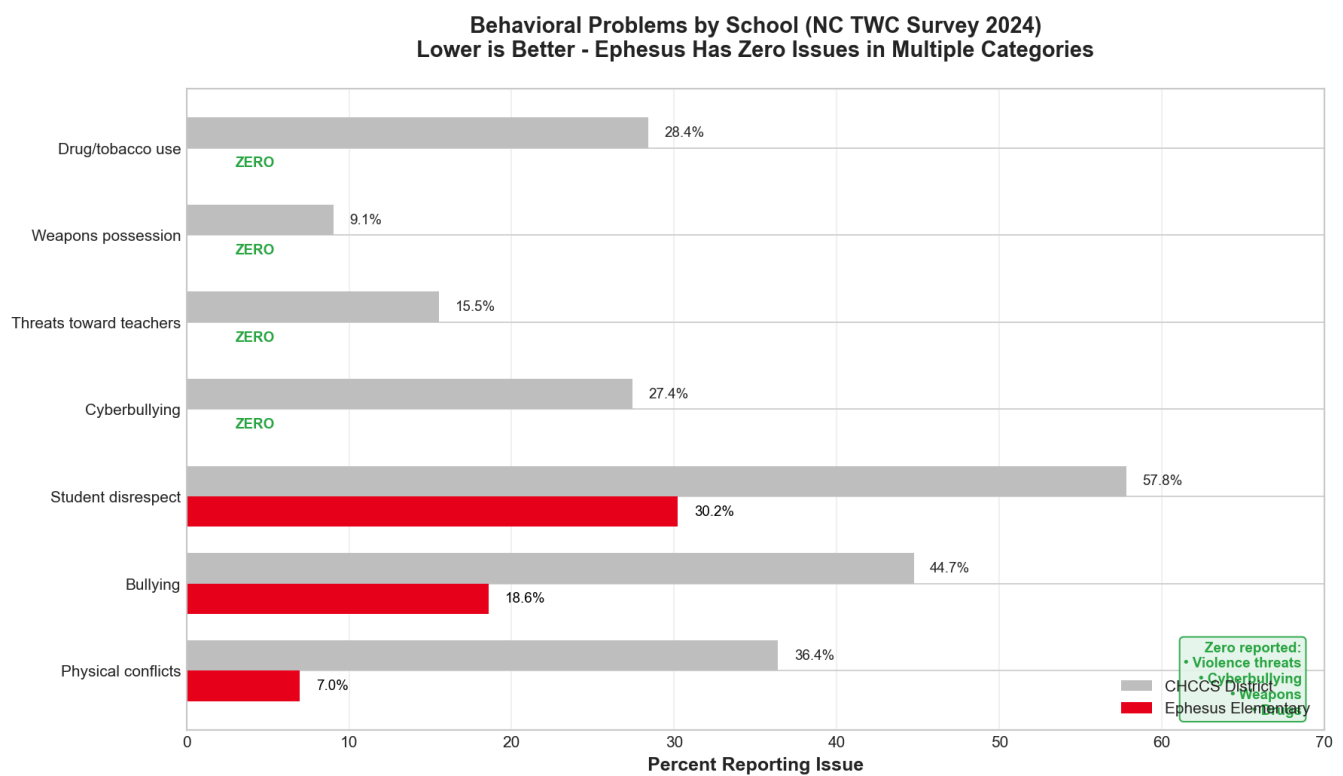


Figure 1b: Behavioral problems by school - lower is better (NC TWC Survey 2024). Ephesus reports zero incidents in multiple categories.

Metric	Ephesus	District	Difference
Students follow conduct rules	97.67%	68.83%	+29 pts
Physical conflicts among students	6.98%	36.38%	5x fewer
Threats of violence toward teachers	0%	15.54%	Zero

Cyberbullying	0%	27.43%	Zero
Weapons possession	0%	9.05%	Zero
Drug/tobacco use	0%	28.42%	Zero

Facilities Note: Teachers report facility challenges (building maintenance: 42% vs 69% district). This supports the case for **renovation investment, not closure**. Teachers succeed despite facility limitations—the culture and community are what matter most.

Source: NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey 2024 (43 Ephesus respondents, 1,017 district-wide)¹⁶

Equity & Access

Title I Status Matters

Ephesus is a **federally designated Title I school**, meaning it serves a high-poverty student population that requires additional support. Closing Ephesus would disproportionately harm our most vulnerable families.

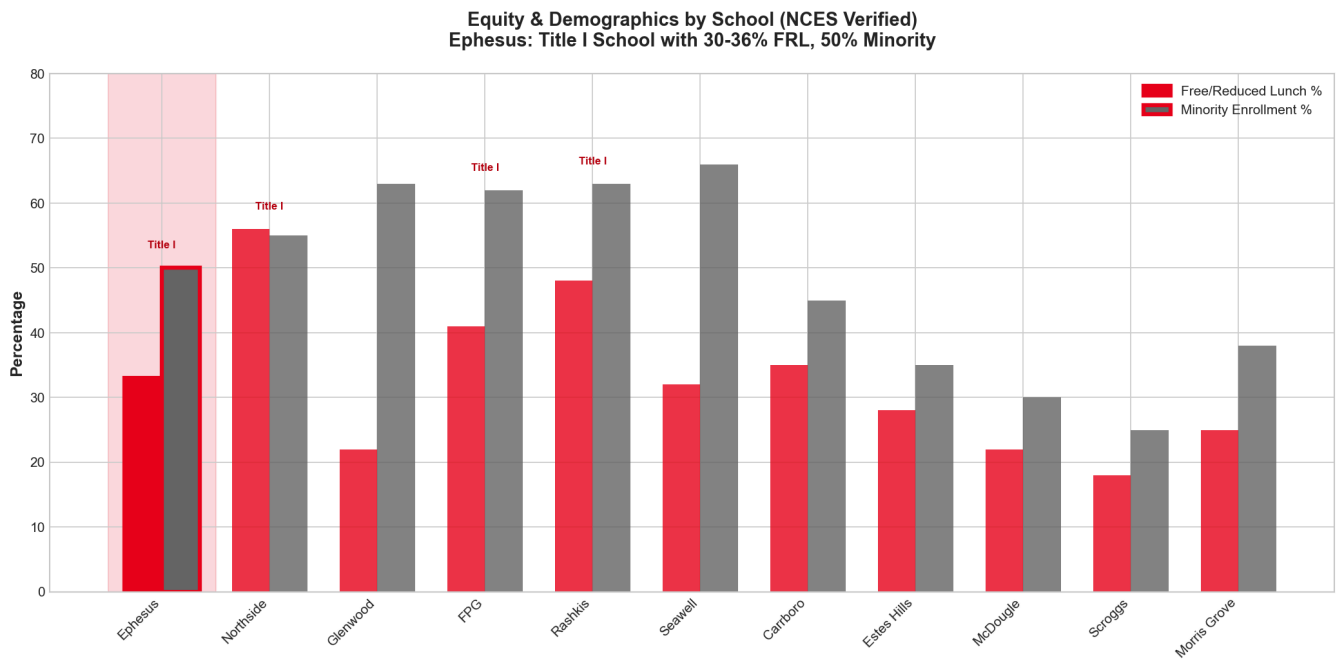


Figure 2: Free/Reduced Lunch and Minority Enrollment by School.¹

Ephesus Demographics¹

Metric	Ephesus
Free/Reduced Lunch	30-36%
Minority Enrollment	50%
Title I Status	Yes
EC Pre-K Staff	2 of 3 district-wide*

Equity Consideration: Closing a Title I school serving low-income and minority students requires careful consideration. The district's own framework (Slide 15) explicitly requires "assess[ing] impact on racial or ethnic groups" for facility decisions.¹⁵

Source: NCES Common Core of Data¹

Community Impact & Housing Development

Walkable Neighborhood School

Ephesus Elementary has strong walkability with **99 students walking to school**.^{*} The NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey confirms exceptional community ties: **98% of teachers say parents know what's going on** at school—13 points above district average.¹⁶ The district's own evaluation framework (2024 Bond Presentation, Slide 36) explicitly rates walkability impact as "Maintained," "Reduced," or "Not available."¹⁵ Closing Ephesus would move from "Maintained" to "Not available" for current walkers.

Closing Ephesus would mean:

- **Added transportation costs:** ~\$57K-\$75K/year for new bus routes (NC estimates)
- **Lost environmental benefits** from fewer students walking
- **Broken neighborhood connections** built over decades

Housing Development Near Ephesus

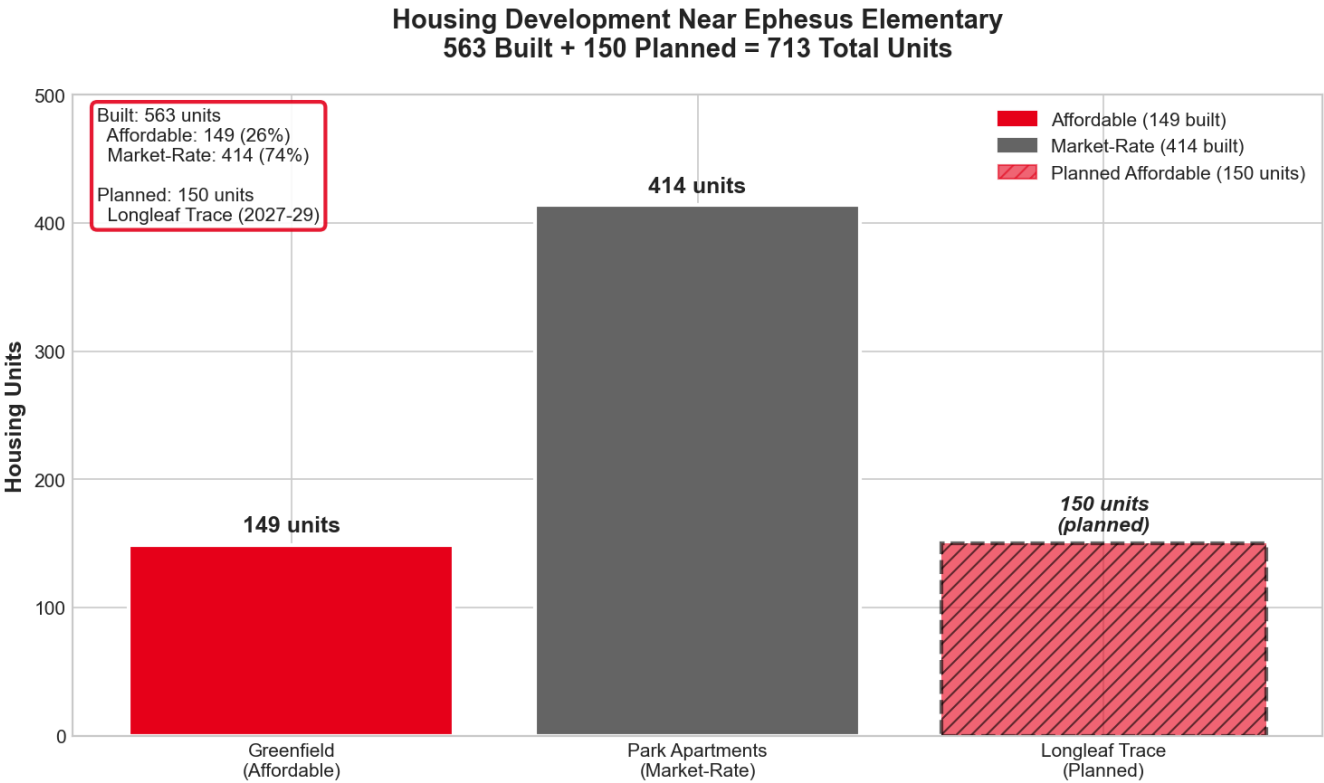


Figure 3: Housing development near Ephesus (563 built + 150 planned = 713 total units).

Development	Units	Type	Status
Greenfield (Place + Commons)	149	Affordable	Completed
Park Apartments	414	Market-Rate	Under Construction
Longleaf Trace (Legion Rd) ¹³	150	Affordable (planned)	Planned 2027-29
Total (built)	563	149 affordable (26%)	
Total (with planned)	713	299 affordable (42%)	

District-Wide Housing Comparison

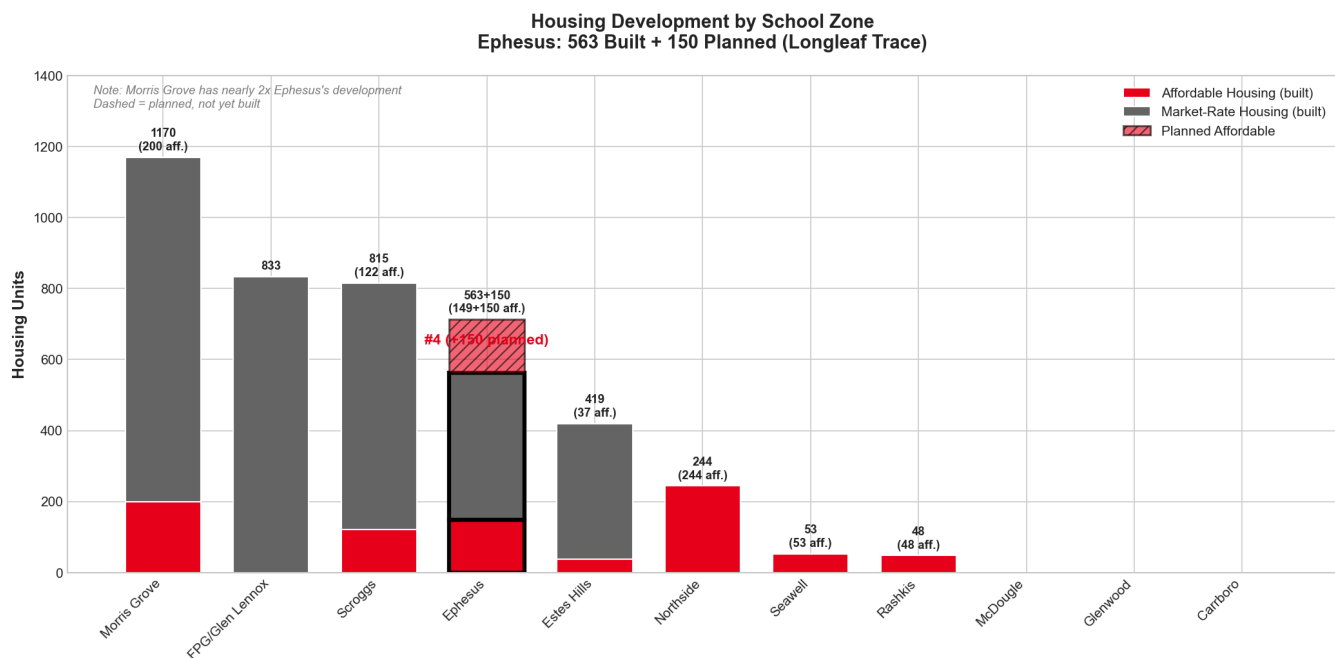


Figure 4: Housing development by school zone (all 11 elementary schools).

Honest Context: Ephesus ranks 4th in total housing development among CHCCS school zones. Morris Grove has nearly double the development (~1,170 units). Northside has the highest concentration of affordable housing (244 units, 100% affordable).

*Parent-reported figure. Sources: Town of Chapel Hill³, Chapel Hill Affordable Housing⁴

Financial Analysis

Verified Financial Data

Cost Category	Amount	Source
Gross savings from closure	+\$1.7M/year	CHCCS (Aug 2025)
Added bus costs (99 students)	-\$57K to -\$75K/year	NC estimates
Building maintenance (if retained)	-\$60K to -\$150K/year	National benchmarks*
Net annual savings	~\$1.53M/year	

Long-Term Considerations

- **Ephesus renovation estimate:** \$28.9M (Woolpert Phase 2, years 5-10)
- **Bond allocation:** \$174.7M to CHCCS for 3 school replacements (Carrboro, Estes Hills, FPG)
- **Ephesus bond funding:** \$0 (not receiving replacement funds)

Request for the Board: We request a comprehensive review of all schools using the district's own 11-driver framework (Slide 12)—including facility condition, walkability, enrollment, equity, and community impact—before making closure decisions.¹⁵

*Building maintenance estimates based on national benchmarks (Philadelphia, Chicago data). No CHCCS-specific data available.

The Real Challenge: Attracting Families

Core Issue: Closing schools does not address the fundamental problem—young families aren't moving to Chapel Hill due to housing costs and limited affordable options.

Why Families Choose Other Districts

- **Housing costs** among the highest in the Triangle region
- **Limited affordable family housing** options compared to surrounding areas
- **Surrounding areas** offer comparable schools at lower cost of living

How Closures Make This Worse

Eliminating walkable neighborhood schools removes a key selling point for young families considering Chapel Hill. This creates a downward spiral:

- Fewer walkable schools → Chapel Hill less attractive to families
- Fewer families → continued enrollment decline
- Lower enrollment → pressure to close more schools

Enrollment Projections: Ephesus is Positioned for Growth

School	Change 2019-2025	Projected Change 2025-2036
Ephesus	-46	+21

Key insight: While Ephesus experienced pandemic-era decline like other schools, projections show enrollment GROWTH through 2036—unlike some schools slated for closure.¹⁴

Transportation Crisis

Before adding bus routes, consider the existing crisis. CHCCS is struggling to staff current routes—adding 99 students to the bus system creates operational risk. The district's evaluation criteria (Slide 36) explicitly assess bus route additions, student ride time, and corridor traffic impact.¹⁵

CHCCS Transportation Data (2023-24)⁸

Metric	Value
Driver count decline	70+ → 37 drivers
Instructional hours lost (first 39 days)	3,950 hours
Student ride times	Up to 60+ minutes

North Carolina Context⁸

- NC ranks **50th nationally** in school bus driver pay
- Average salary: \$14,628/year
- 27 states pay 50%+ more than North Carolina

Implication: Converting 99 walkers to bus riders when we cannot adequately staff existing routes creates operational and safety concerns.

Equity and Achievement Gaps

Chapel Hill has significant achievement gaps that closing Title I schools may worsen.

Chapel Hill Achievement Data (Stanford Educational Opportunity Project)⁷

Metric	Value
Black students achievement gap	4.3 grade levels behind white peers
AP class enrollment disparity	Black students 3.7x less likely to enroll
Discipline disparity	45% of suspensions (11.4% of enrollment)

Why this matters: Ephesus is a Title I school serving diverse, low-income populations. Research shows school closures disproportionately harm these communities.^{10,11}

Research on School Closure Impacts

Academic research consistently documents negative effects of school closures on displaced students:

- **Engberg et al. (2012):** Closures disproportionately affect low-income students¹⁰
- **de la Torre & Gwynne (2009):** Displaced students rarely land in higher-performing schools¹¹
- **Kirshner et al. (2010):** Closure creates lasting emotional and academic disruption¹²
- **Sunderman & Payne (2009):** Students from closed schools show measurable academic decline

Research Consensus: The burden of school closures falls heaviest on the most vulnerable students—exactly the population Ephesus serves as a Title I school.

Strategic Recommendation

Ephesus is a Valuable Community Asset

Rather than viewing Ephesus as a cost to eliminate, the Board should recognize it as a strategic asset that:

- **Achieves academic excellence** - 4th in district growth with "Exceeded" status
- **Advances equity** by serving diverse, high-need populations (Title I school)
- **Supports community development** with 563 housing units nearby
- **Promotes sustainability** through walkability (99 students walk to school)

Our Request to the Board

1. **Keep Ephesus Elementary open** as a vital neighborhood school
2. **Recognize Ephesus's academic success** - among top 4 in district growth
3. **Consider the community impact** of closing a Title I school
4. **Align school planning with housing development** for long-term community benefit

References

1. NCES Common Core of Data - nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/
2. NC School Report Cards (2023-24) - ncreports.ondemand.sas.com
3. Town of Chapel Hill - townofchapelhill.org
4. Chapel Hill Affordable Housing - chapelhillaffordablehousing.org
5. CHCCS Bond Overview - chccs.org/community/schoolbond/overview
6. Chapelboro News - chapelboro.com
7. Stanford Educational Opportunity Project - edopportunity.org
8. WRAL News, NC State Board of Education transportation data
9. Charlotte Urban Institute - transportation cost estimates
10. Engberg et al. (2012), RAND Corporation - school closure impacts

11. de la Torre & Gwynne (2009), UChicago Consortium - displaced student outcomes
12. Kirshner et al. (2010), Teachers College Record - closure disruption effects
13. Chapel Hill Engage, Longleaf Trace project - engage.chapelhillnc.gov/legion-property
14. CHCCS Enrollment Projections (Slide 28)
15. 2024 Bond Project Update Presentation (July 18, 2024) - CHCCS/Orange County/Woolpert
16. NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey 2024 - nctwcs.org (43 Ephesus respondents)

* indicates parent-supplied data requiring independent verification

The Bottom Line: Ephesus Elementary delivers strong academic results, serves a diverse community, and is positioned for future growth. The approximately \$1.53M annual savings from closure must be weighed against the long-term costs of losing a thriving neighborhood school.

Prepared by concerned members of the Ephesus Elementary community.

Data sources: NC School Report Cards, NCES, CHCCS, NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey, Town of Chapel Hill

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** indicates parent-supplied data requiring independent verification*