

Bill to Give Control of MCS to Ball State Heading to Senate

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INDIANAPOLIS - A bill that would give control of Muncie Community Schools to Ball State University has passed the Indiana House. Ball State President Geoffrey Mearns says the terms of [House Bill 1315](#), which now heads to the Indiana Senate for consideration, must still be approved by the university's Board of Trustees after receiving approval from the legislature.

If passed, the bill could allow Ball State to govern MCS with a new seven-member board consisting of appointments from the university, the mayor of Muncie and the Muncie City Council.

In an email Thursday to Ball State students, faculty, staff and alumni, Mearns says he has already begun discussions with members of the community regarding the proposed takeover and the reaction has been "mostly positive." He says the bill creates a two-year period to develop a plan for the takeover with the community and the first year will be dedicated solely to listening to community members.

You can read Mearns' full email below:

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Dear Colleagues and Friends:

I write to provide more information about the proposed legislation concerning the future of the Muncie Community Schools (“MCS”). You will recall that this proposed legislation provides that, on July 1, 2018, Ball State University may assume responsibility for managing MCS.

In my initial email message on January 17, I explained that I support this legislation because it presents an historic opportunity for our University and the community that we serve. Ball State is uniquely qualified to assume this important responsibility because, for 100 years, we have been preparing outstanding teachers and innovative academic leaders. And we already have a deep relationship with MCS.

In addition to being consistent with our core mission as a public university, this new responsibility is also consistent with our institutional interest in a vital and vibrant Muncie, which in turn rests on the quality of our public schools. And I reiterated my belief that the success of this effort lies in collaboration with the entire community – the MCS teachers, students, and families, and every member of the community who wants to partner with us.

Today, after several weeks of public debate, the Indiana House of Representatives passed the legislation by a substantial majority. The legislation now moves to the Indiana Senate, where deliberations will include a public committee hearing. Senate action is expected by March 6. If the proposed legislation is approved by both chambers, then it goes to the Governor for his signature.

Under the terms of the proposed legislation, our Board of Trustees must also approve our University's involvement. That determination will be made if and when the proposed legislation is approved by the General Assembly. The Trustees support the proposed legislation because they understand that it is consistent with our mission and our institutional interests. They also appreciate that it is the right thing to do for a community that has supported our University for 100 years. Indeed, our Trustees are eager to demonstrate how our students, faculty, staff, and alumni can transform lives through education and service, and what can be accomplished in a spirit of collaboration and shared interests.

I would like to expand on the importance of community engagement to this effort. At our request, the proposed legislation provides a two-year period for us to develop a plan in concert with the community. The first year will be dedicated solely to listening to the community – listening to other people's suggestions as to how to provide an excellent education for our children. This engagement process has made Ball State's "Schools Within the Context of Community" a success and a model for engagement for educators across the country.

I have already begun to engage with the community. I have personally met with school board members, Mayor Tyler, members of the Muncie City Council, and the Collective Coalition of Concerned Clergy. We are also inviting people to share their ideas and learn more about the effort through social and traditional media and via our website. Our goal will be to develop a community plan, as we are all truly in this together.

Unfortunately, some people have claimed that this proposal is an implicit criticism of MCS teachers. MCS teachers are not responsible for the challenges facing MCS. To the contrary, I respect them, and I admire their professional and personal dedication to educating our children. We will engage MCS teachers to learn more about their ideas for the future. Simply put, dedicated, experienced teachers must be part of the solution.

I know some of you are parents of MCS students. We have been receiving input, mostly positive, from other parents of MCS students, and I am grateful for their support. They have questions, too. I understand the importance of any issue concerning our children, especially something as fundamental as their education. I encourage all parents to continue to get involved.

The Ball State community, of which you are a part, is central to this effort, too. Help us seize this opportunity. Make sure you are informed about the process by visiting www.bsu.edu/mcs. Please share the facts with your friends, your families, and your colleagues. And if you want to become more involved, I encourage you to contact us.

During my engagement with people on this issue, I share with them how impressed I am by the depth of the passion the Ball State community has for Muncie and for MCS. I am proud of their commitment to service. And I am optimistic that, working together, we will create a very bright future for Muncie and our children. ”