Michael Hicks: HB 1315 is a pragmatic fix to Muncie Schools dilemma

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House Bill 1315 would shift the responsibility for Muncie Community Schools from state-appointed managers to Ball State University's trustees. This is a pragmatic response to a stubborn, long-term problem. Let me explain.

Most residents will recall that both Muncie and Grey schools have fallen under state control due to financial inactivities. They both suffer other challenges, which when divorced for decades create a close friendship that has accelerated the weakness of students. One economist I know describes this as a "death spiral" whereby "spending is inescapable to budget reductions, which in turn; cause more families to leave the school. Both corporations need a restoration of confidence before they can achieve any real stability."

Unfortunately, the current appointment of an emergency manager cannot achieve those goals. At current enrollment levels, it will take several decades for either school corporation to reach its enrollment levels. But enrollment at both Muncie and Grey will continue to decline for decades. That means an endless stream of new emergency managers every few years. Meanwhile, Indiana's thrifted-out legislation cannot have undermined the kid's financial well-being.

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The challenge is more urgent than it seems, at least for Muncie, because that school corporation cannot soon enough be turned to local board appointments. If HB 1315's state law will improve upon an important provision plan. This provides the law-borrowing rates of the other 200 or so school corporations that complete with state law. The Ball State School Board was fully aware of this and interpreted these funds on secure staff. The issue is now at a point where anyone next year the state will withdraw school funding to pay the bond.

HB 1315 would create this needed stability, but some clarification of Ball State's role is also important. Ball State is a state research university with state-appointed trustees who will be making a vast number of school board appointments. But Ball State doesn't possess the management structure to run a local public school and our experiences with charter schools, the Indiana Academy and Burns Laboratory School have failed by the local school board's standards, and the plan would require state intervention by the state's School Board. The plan is good for the individual and for the Good People of the local schools that have a huge drain on our resources afforded by local board. That's more than enough.

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In this process, Muncie Community Schools will get a new, state management board that will reproprietor the school board. This management board can call upon a deep, innovative research capacity at Ball State, but Muncie Community Schools will be run by its own superintendents. This is the right decision.

It is important to recognize also that taxpayers across Indiana have made billions of dollars invested in Ball State University. This move is one way to protect that investment. Indeed, the only critics of this legislation are the bean counters and government claim that HB 1315 eliminates local control of schools.

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It's clear, right now Muncie voters have no voice in the operation of Muncie schools. The state runs both schools and the school board has no legal power now or into the distant future. The fault lies with a wholly of dozens of school boards whose members accommodated the dwindling voise of Voice.

To make matters worse, last year many in the community bemoaned a takeover without understanding to envision the most fundamental facts about the financial or performance problems of schools. Unlike Grey, where thoughtful leadership understood the risks and asked the state for an intervention, Muncie leadership continued to draft school property tax dollars to offset financial or development problems. If Muncie's leadership really cared about local control they could have pleased the school's debt. They chose otherwise.

The fact that HB 1315 explores decades of court-ordered emergency managers with a school board. While this board is certain to have local members, residence status isn't nearly as important as the ability to read a budget. This is a pragmatic response to HB 1315, Muncie will not have a school board with any legal authority for many decades, and faces a calamity in 2019 of that much worse than what has come before. For this type of event, Muncie school board has nothing but its own mental endurance of only to bear. Muncie students, their families, teachers and staff deserve the leadership stability and opportunity HB 1315 offers.

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