



**BALL STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Office of the President

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES
COMMENTS BY GEOFFREY S. MEARNES
March 26, 2021**

I begin my remarks by expressing my gratitude to you, our Board of Trustees, for reappointing Dave Heeter as a member of the Board of Muncie Community Schools. Dave's leadership experience has been of great benefit to the school board. I appreciate his willingness to continue serving in a role that demonstrates his commitment to the children of Muncie and to our community.

Dave's reappointment is one of several positive developments for MCS. I am pleased to report that teacher retention rates have increased substantially since the advent of our partnership with MCS. In 2017, before our partnership with MCS, the teacher retention rate was only 67%. In just that one year, 140 teachers retired or resigned. This year, the retention rate was 97%. Only 10 teachers have decided to retire or resign.

I believe that this improvement can be attributed to more professional development opportunities, to increased compensation for teachers and staff, and

to a shared sense of optimism that is inspired by the partnership between MCS and our University.

I am grateful to Dr. Lee Ann Kwiatkowski, CEO and director of public education for MCS, for overseeing the changes and innovations that have resulted in many of the positive outcomes that have taken place at MCS over the past two years. These changes and innovations have helped to stabilize enrollment. In fact, Dr. Kwiatkowski informed me that, at a recent meeting with Delaware County superintendents, she learned that the other schools in the county have experienced lower than anticipated enrollment in February, because families are no longer transferring their children out of MCS to those other schools.

I also want to share an update about the school district's plans to repay the \$12 million loan that was issued to MCS by the state in November 2018. MCS was granted up to 10 years to repay the loan. But because of sound fiscal management, the school district has asked to fully repay the loan in 2022. This significant development is a direct reflection of the transformational leadership of Dr. Kwiatkowski, her administrative team, and the MCS school board. Their commitment to the success of MCS bolsters my confidence that our public schools are on the path to a bright future.

Success is also the word I would use to describe results from this year's Dance Marathon. As many of you know, Dance Marathon is our University's

largest student philanthropic event. Typically, the event involves hundreds of our students participating in 12 hours of dancing, games, and entertainment for a great cause: to raise money for Riley Hospital for Children.

This year, due to the pandemic, our students had to be very creative. Despite the need for precautionary measures like masks and social distancing, they were able to safely conduct the event “virtually”, which allowed them to raise more than \$322,000 for Riley. The money will help fund the hospital’s palliative care team and the Magic Castle Cart—a cart that, for decades, has brought smiles and special gifts to children during their stays at the hospital.

I am proud of our students’ commitment to such a great cause. More than 190 students volunteered to work on the event, and more than 1,600 people from six different countries watched the livestreamed program. I applaud our student’s ability to find innovative ways to raise money for Riley during this pandemic.

Our students are also playing an important role in One Ball State Day, which will be on April 6. Fifteen students serve on our Philanthropy Education Council. We also have more than 100 faculty and staff who have volunteered to represent their colleagues as college, division, department, or unit ambassadors. I am grateful for their service. I am also grateful to the local businesses – more than 40 of them – which are sponsoring this important event.

Once again this year, we will demonstrate that the members of our University community demonstrate their gratitude through their actions.

I am also proud of our student-athletes, who continue to demonstrate that COVID-19 cannot defeat their drive to excel on the field and in the classroom. Last Fall, across all sports programs, our student-athletes earned a median GPA of 3.38 for the Fall 2020 semester—the best collective semester GPA on record.

And with Spring officially underway, our student-athletes have a renewed appreciation for the privilege of competing for our University. Our baseball team had a strong start to the season, our women's tennis program is on a 12-match winning streak, and our nationally ranked gymnastics team will have four athletes competing in the 2021 NCAA Regionals, which begin April 1.

I am grateful to our coaches and to our athletics staff who keep our student-athletes motivated and in good health as we continue to overcome the challenges of this pandemic.

I am also grateful to all of the people, the faculty, staff, and students from our College of Health—and especially Ro-Anne Royer Engle—who have made it possible for our University to establish a COVID-19 vaccination site on our campus. The clinic began operating in the Health Professions Building on March 19. In the first day of operation, our nursing students and faculty vaccinated 42 people. In the coming weeks, I anticipate that we will be able to expand the

number of people whom we can vaccinate each day. The clinic is open to anyone in the community who meets current eligibility criteria for the vaccine, and appointments can be arranged online through the state's vaccination website or by calling the state's 211 hotline.

Finally, I want to remind the Board that we have set the dates for our in-person Commencement exercises in May.

On Friday evening, May 7, we will recognize our Spring 2021 candidates who are earning their doctoral, specialist, and master's degrees. On Saturday, May 8, we will recognize our Spring 2021 bachelor's and associate candidates. The following weekend, on Saturday, May 15, we will recognize the Class of 2020 graduates.

As of yesterday at noon, more than 2,200 students have registered to participate in our Spring 2021 Commencement ceremonies on May 7 and 8, and more than 800 of our 2020 graduates plan to return to campus to participate in the May 15 ceremony.

I want to thank Angel Tuttle and Stephanie Arrington for coordinating the details involved in scheduling and planning these ceremonies. Because of their efforts, our graduates, their families, and their friends will be able to participate in an event that represents a major milestone for them—and marks the return of a time-honored tradition for all of us at our University.

Thank you.