



**BALL STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

Office of the President

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
COMMENTS BY GEOFFREY S. MEARNES  
September 6, 2019**

We begin our new academic year with positive enrollment news. This Fall, our University welcomed 22,541 students—an all-time record. We also attracted our largest, most academically qualified, and most diverse freshman class in our institution’s 101-year history. As you heard earlier in Vice President Kay Bales’ enrollment report, more than 76 percent of our entering freshmen earned an academic honors diploma, which is also a record. And our off-campus enrollment, which includes our online students, increased for the seventh consecutive year to a record-high 6,572 students.

Although this news is encouraging, we have work to do to address recent declines in our undergraduate retention rate. Student success must be the top priority for all of us here at our University. We plan to address this issue by providing our faculty with necessary tools to support our students, implementing technology tools that will enhance our ability to intervene on behalf of at-risk

students, and improving our engagement with parents and families. These plans were among the strategies shared with you earlier today in the presentation led by Provost Susana Rivera-Mills and Vice President Ro-Anne Royer Engle.

You may recall that, exactly a year ago today, we gathered on campus for the public kick-off of our Centennial Celebration. We celebrated this milestone with the premiere of our student-produced Centennial and fireworks over the Quad. Then, throughout our Centennial year, we had lectures and concerts on campus, and we had roadshows in cities across Indiana. Our University was honored at a formal gala in Chicago, and we held alumni gatherings all across the country. We also honored the members of the extended Ball family for their extraordinary and sustained generosity to our University.

Our Centennial celebration required substantial planning by a large committee. I am especially grateful to Stephanie Arrington and Kathy Wolf, who led this committee and who presented about our Centennial efforts earlier today.

You might have noticed a number of faculty, staff, and students walking around campus today wearing our new Beneficence t-shirts. We encouraged the campus community to wear these shirts as they participated in today's United Way Day of Action. On a related note, our annual Ball State Employee United Way campaign kicks off next week. We have pledged to raise \$200,000 for this year's 2019 campaign. I hope all of us at our University—all of our faculty, all of our

staff, and all of our students—can demonstrate once more through our actions and through our gifts how we are Better Together.

Our University's renewed commitment to our local United Way is just one example of our strategic efforts to be recognized as a community-engaged institution. Another example is our University's ongoing, innovative partnership with Muncie Community Schools.

As you heard from the Provost and from MCS School Board President Jim Williams, we are encouraged by the progress made during this first year of the partnership. I am confident that, as the new director of public education and CEO, Dr. Lee Ann Kwiatkowski will lead our public schools in a positive direction.

Later this month, MCS faculty and staff will come together with nationally recognized educators for an innovation summit. The outcomes from this summit will inform the Academic Innovation and Financial Viability Plan that is being developed by members of our joint MCS/Ball State Academic Innovation Council.

And finally, we are about to adjourn to head down the street for the ceremonial groundbreaking of our new Foundational Sciences Building. When this building is completed in the Summer of 2021, it will provide modern teaching and research spaces in chemistry and biology. And it will join our newly constructed Health Professions Building in helping our University recruit and retain students who want to pursue careers in the sciences.

Today—and every day—it is a privilege to serve as the president of Ball State University.

Thank you.