

# Ball State, Muncie schools a prime opportunity

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(Photo: The Star Press)

Since I have the privilege of having a job that takes me across Indiana and the United States, I can tell you that the struggles of Muncie and Muncie Community Schools are not all that rare. I can also say that having an asset like Ball State University in our backyard, willing to assume the responsibility of bringing our schools back from the academic and financial brink, is an incredibly rare blessing.

As we are all so familiar with Ball State, it is easy to look past it and forget how fortunate we are to have the university. BSU is the largest employer in Delaware County. Last year, nearly 3,000 Ball State students provided 60,000 service hours to 140 community groups – the university is truly a community partner. Founded 100 years ago, Teachers College is also the leading producer of teachers and innovative academic practices

and programs.

This year, the university welcomed its largest enrollment (more than 22,500 students). It has a dynamic new president who showed his willingness to engage with Muncie in new, exciting ways even before the issue of assuming responsibility for MCS ever came up.

Now, Ball State is willing to bring forward a solution to one of our community's biggest challenges: assuming responsibility for MCS for no other reason than to ensure our children get a quality education. If that was the only result, it would be a noble endeavor. But with better schools, I know we will see other benefits throughout Muncie.

As a business owner, I understand the shape of our schools contributes to: a lack of growth in our current businesses, difficulty in attracting new businesses and the challenge in finding and recruiting new talent. Better schools will lead to a better business base that benefits all. Most importantly, Ball State's commitment to MCS provides a transformational solution – one available to no other community. A solution that provides hope to our next generation and a solution that will give us a competitive edge among those communities we compete with.

The financial and enrollment problems at MCS are hardly new. Enrollment at MCS has declined by 26.1 percent since the 2005-2006 school year; roughly half of this decline (13.8 percent) represents MCS students choosing to attend other local public schools. Deficit spending reaches back a decade. Clearly, a bold, new, innovative approach is a must. I believe that is exactly what Ball State assuming responsibility for MCS represents. Our community, parents, teachers, administrators all want the students to succeed – now Ball State is ready to step up. This approach is a once in a lifetime moment for all of Muncie to embrace the opportunity to create a new and world-class education system.

*J Chapman is president, Woof Boom Radio, Muncie.*

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