



## BOTTOM OF THE CLASS

There's no shortage of plans for what to do about Bradley Tech, MPS' ailing trade school. But which is right? **BY KAY NOLAN**

Last June, when Milwaukee Public Schools named the Lynde and Harry Bradley Technology and Trade High School – better known as Bradley Tech – one of 14 “underperforming” schools to be included in a new, three-year rescue plan, Lyle Balistreri sighed. The retired union president of the Milwaukee Building and Construction Trades Council had seen too many three- to four-year plans like the new Commitment Schools program, with its “rigorous academic and behavioral interventions,” fail to correct the tech school’s academic failings, poor graduation rates and behavior issues, the same troubles that plague many other urban high schools. Worse, Bradley Tech seemed to be losing its 100-plus-year reputation for producing graduates ready to pursue trade apprenticeships, associate degrees or blue-collar jobs.

Others agreed. “I don’t know that anyone in tech education would say it’s a true tech school anymore,” says Ricardo Diaz,

executive director of the United Community Center, which serves the South Side neighborhood where Bradley Tech is located.

Some 13 years ago, Balistreri had worked alongside business, higher education and philanthropic leaders to reinvent and renovate what was then called the “Milwaukee Trade and Technical High School” using a mixture of public and private dollars, including \$20 million from the family behind the Allen-Bradley Co. (currently Rockwell Automation). Now, he wondered if another unconventional overhaul might be in order, and sought advice from Patricia Hoben, who heads up the Carmen High School of Science and Technology, a South Side charter school with a record of improving academic performance among students from the same low-income neighborhood as Bradley. Their conversations eventually led to a formal presentation in January before Bradley’s 11-person oversight commission, where Balistreri serves as chairman.

Carmen, the plan stated, would open a new high school inside Bradley Tech, which has enough empty space to accommodate hundreds more students, while Bradley would retain its name and identity.

Reaction to the proposed partnership has been frosty. Fran Croak, a Milwaukee lawyer who serves on the Bradley Tech commission, predicted in an interview that the “school board is not likely to approve it. I just don’t think MPS would agree to it.”

For his part, School Board President Michael Bonds opposes the idea and says he instead favors Superintendent Darienne Driver’s new plan for the school – which was reportedly put together after meetings this summer with Milwaukee Area Technical College officials and Bradley Tech. After declining several requests for an interview, Driver (through MPS spokesman Tony Tagliavia) said, “Our goal is to continue to build a strong trade and technical program at Bradley Tech.” As of the magazine’s press time, the district had not yet acknowledged whether it had a specific plan to improve Bradley Tech, and Balistreri said the commission hadn’t been clued in, either.

“Your guess is as good as mine,” he said, after postponing a commission meeting set for early February. Behind the scenes, his Carmen proposal had set off a small firestorm. “I had no idea I would get so much pushback,” he says. “I don’t care what people feel about me. It should really be all about the kids. They’re not getting an education, and they deserve a good education.”

Data from the state Department of Public Instruction underscores his point: In the 2013-14 school year, Bradley Tech sank to dead last among all Milwaukee public high schools on its School Report Card, an overall rating based on student academics and attendance, college readiness and whether a school is closing performance gaps. Its overall score of just 29.5 (63 is needed to “meet expectations”) trailed other low-ranking high schools in the city, including Vincent

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

**Mil** → Hales Corners Olympic speedskater **ALYSON DUDEK** and bobsledder boyfriend **STEVE LANGTON** earned spots in the latest season of the “Amazing Race.”

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

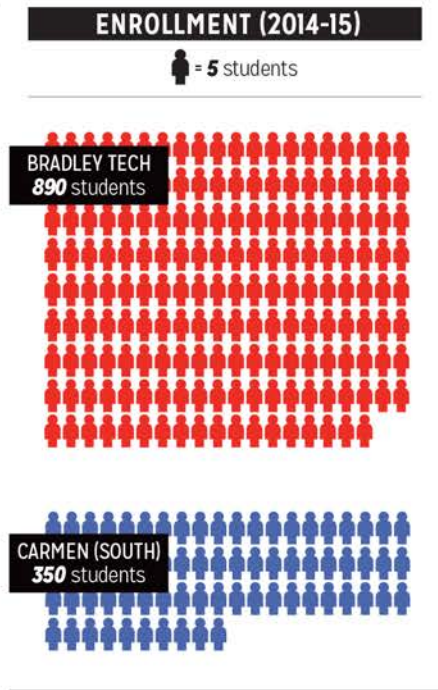
(31.3), South Division (31.5), Pulaski (32.2), North Division (32.9), Madison (33.9), Hamilton (48.1), and Riverside (52.2).

In the same year's standardized testing, only 6 percent of Bradley Tech students scored as "proficient" or better in math, alongside 7.9 percent in reading.

Carmen, which accepts students of all academic levels by lottery, follows a STEM-focused (science, technology, engineering and math) curriculum and sends kids "to college at a higher rate than any other high school in Milwaukee," according to Hoben, who wants to expand its technical offerings. In return for a partnership with Bradley, her school would share its strengths in teaching literacy, math and professional skills.

Carmen's 2013-14 Report Card rating was 60.3, which approaches the scores of schools in blue-collar areas, such as West Allis Central (61.9), St. Francis (65.8), Cudahy (66.2), Greenfield (67.7) and South Milwaukee (69.2). On the same year's standardized tests, 18.2 percent of Carmen students scored proficient or better in both math and reading.

Critics say Bradley Tech is failing to link its "career pathway" technical course options with interested students and instead ends up with many kids shunted along by MPS to meet minimum capacity goals. "It's almost like a skills gap of its own," says Jonathan Feld, an MATC official who works with area high schools, arranging for their seniors to



earn credits through the technical college. "I think a philosophy for any school district is, 'What's your interest? What's the spark, and how do we point you in that direction?'"

According to Bradley Tech's principal, Tamara Hines, the school's real problem is that many of its students live in poverty. Asked to expound on what the Commitment Schools effort will mean in practice, she describes reaching out to social workers and community groups such as the United Way to help students resolve socio-economic needs and improve access to health and child care. Hines also hopes to enlist more pupils from

a nearby STEM-focused elementary school in Bradley Tech's career pathways.

"We have pieces of excellence at Bradley," says Lauren Baker, who formerly coordinated career and tech education in the district and now represents the Milwaukee teachers' union on the Bradley Tech Commission. Many students at the school excel, she says, and its chess team, aquaponics lab and welding facility are top-flight. "Rather than walk away from that and bring someone else in, let's grow that excellence and make this the kind of school we need in this community."

Other local leaders support the proposed "knowledge sharing" partnership between Bradley and Carmen. "I think that's an immensely attractive option," says Pedro Colón, a Milwaukee County judge who lives a block from Bradley and once served on its commission. "They did, frankly, have many years to do something," he says of MPS.

The idea also intrigues Scott Jansen, a former AT&T Wisconsin executive and Bradley Tech commission chair who now oversees apprenticeship programs at the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. "At Bradley Tech, in years gone by, there may have been 20 or 30 students in youth apprenticeship programs," he says. "When I took over as commission chair [in 2011], it had dwindled to zero." ■

**WUWM** MILWAUKEE PUBLIC RADIO | HEAR MORE ABOUT THE STORY ON WUWM'S "LAKE EFFECT" MARCH 18 AT 10 A.M.

## THE HOAN BRIDGE BLUES

*We keep repainting it the same colors, and nobody seems to care.*  
BY MATT HRODEVY

**THE HOAN BRIDGE** has always been the same colors: blue and yellow. When it first opened to traffic in 1977, it was blue and yellow. When engineers demolished and replaced a sagging section in 2000, they repainted it blue. And as the current redecking is completed later this year, workers will paint the support beams and superstructure, you guessed it, blue and yellow. ("Ochre-yellow," to be

precise.) Named for Milwaukee's second of three Socialist mayors, Daniel Hoan, the bridge has outlasted both attempts to replace it with a lakeside boulevard and the ire of early freeway opponents, who prevented Interstate 794, then still under construction, from connecting to the new blue and yellow bridge for some five years. Between 1972 and 1977, the "bridge to nowhere" was about as functional as a hood ornament (painted blue and yellow).

For years, this color scheme has been a foregone conclusion,

and how it came about may have been lost to time. Michael Pyritz, a spokesman for the state Department of Transportation, says he couldn't find anyone left in the agency who could explain "how the original paint was selected." The DOT took "input" on plans for the bridge's updated appearance in April 2013, but a controversial - and ultimately successful - proposal to illuminate its twin archways with colored LED lighting stole the show. "There was no real consensus to consider an alternate paint color," he

says. "Most involved seemed to [expect] the paint would remain the familiar colors."

So, barring a bombshell, the Hoan Bridge - expected to last another 40 to 50 years before a second redecking is required - will retain much the same colors as a sandy beach. Is this a bad thing? Officials in both Tokyo and Glasgow, Scotland, have experimented with installing blue streetlights and believe that the calming hue has slightly reduced crime rates in the illuminated areas. Some Japanese train stations have even positioned blue lights above boarding platforms, hoping they'll reduce the number of suicide jumpers, a strategy that's shown some signs of success. Perhaps we could all do with a little more blue (and yellow). ■



**Mil** → The new owners of **PABST BREWING CO.** are looking into opening a small "pilot brewery" in Milwaukee, where the company could test and taste new products.