

## VII. EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

### CORTLAND CITY ENLARGED SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Cortland City School District is one of the City of Cortland’s largest employers, with approximately 500 faculty and staff and 2,800 students in grades K-12. The portion of the district located in the City includes four elementary school buildings and one junior/high school building, (there is a fifth elementary school included in the district which is located in the Town of Virgil). The breakdown for each school building is listed following, as are the statistics for free/reduced lunches.

**TABLE 6**

School Building	Student Population	Free/Reduced Lunches	Percent
Barry	406	185	46%
Parker	266	90	34%
Randall	353	165	47%
Smith	341	123	36%
Virgil	144	40	28%
Junior/Sr. High	1,295	306	24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,805</b>	<b>909</b>	<b>32%</b>

The 2008 district budget was approximately \$42M. Approximately 80% of the budget was salary and benefits. Anticipating a loss of tax revenue, the district enacted a 0% tax levy for 2009 and cut positions to curb costs.

A 2008 interview with Laurence Spring, Superintendent of the School District, brought to light a number of areas where the City District could work together or should continue to work together. The following narrative discusses these issues.

### HOUSING

While many of the school staff do live and work in the City, some of the newer staff choose to live outside of the community and commute. One of the more popular areas where teachers emanate from is Syracuse. Instead of seeking housing in Cortland, there is a tendency for some staff to wait for an opening to occur in the Syracuse area schools and then move. The District would like to work with the City on housing programs that encourage teachers and school staff to reside and seek homeownership in the City of Cortland. One of the thoughts is to prioritize the purchase of in-rem properties in the City and offer them to professionals such as teachers, police, or medical professionals.



Regarding another housing issue, the creation of new housing, particularly dense developments of affordable housing for lower income households, should consider the impact on local elementary schools, particularly Randall and Barry Elementary Schools. The percent of free lunches listed in Table 6 above is indicative of the percentage of students who come from financially struggling households. While it is recognized that children with special needs do not necessarily come from lower income households, there is a correlation between low income and needing special education attention and counseling. According to the Superintendent, while Randall and Barry School staff do an excellent job in addressing these needs, the district would like the City to inform the district of housing projects that would be focused on lower income families with elementary aged school children.

### **JOB PREPAREDNESS**

The Cortland School District partners with the City so that students can work gain valuable work experience or meet community service requirements in City government. Work experience is also gained by working for pay or volunteering in City businesses and not-for-profit organizations.

The School and the City should continue to work at developing programs so that job training in the schools match the skill sets needed by area businesses.

### **GATEWAY TO THE SCHOOL**

A number of years ago, the Cortland School District was concerned with the appearance of the gateways to the junior/senior high school campus where the district offices are also located. The condition of the South Main Street area, in particular, presented a poor first impression to visitors and prospective employees. Over the last five years, the City has embarked or partnered on a number of projects that have greatly improved the aesthetic of the South End. This has had a positive impact on the School District's desire to improve its gateway. The District would like to continue this positive trend.



On a related issue, the City owns the main roadway to and through the junior/senior high school campus, Valley View Drive. The west side of the roadway contains unsightly brush that helps to conceal students who want to smoke or engage in other behaviors that are prohibited on school grounds. The School District is working to clean up the area it owns adjacent to Valley View Drive and wants to work with the City to improve the safety and appearance of the City-owned portion of the roadway. As a first step, the District would like to see the brush cut down or removed.



## TRANSPORTATION

The School District would like to work with the County and City to explore the possibility of using the public bus transportation system as a means to transport students to school.

In 2009, the City secured Safe Routes to School funding from the NYS Department of Transportation to install new sidewalk, replace existing sidewalk, install speed monitoring devices, improve crosswalks, and provide traffic control equipment for the Police Department to improve the sidewalk network on South Pendleton Street. It is hoped this project will encourage more students to walk to the junior high school and Randall Elementary School. The City should continue to work with the School District on identifying and improving the City's sidewalk, trail, and road network to encourage more children and staff to walk or ride their bicycles to school.

In 2009, as a cost-cutting measure, the City's draft budget eliminated the school crossing guard program from the Police Department's budget. This met with significant public outcry and the program was reinstated in the budget. As the City moves to firmer financial footing, the School District would like to work with the City to expand the school crossing guard program to areas that have been identified as needing more supervision for children walking and biking to school. This includes improving the crosswalks and signage where needed.

The City can also be a facilitator of transportation safety programs that focus on school aged children such as continuing to work with the County and School District on safety programs such as distributing bicycle helmets and doing outreach in the schools regarding bicycle safety and walking safely to school, etc.

## SAFETY

The School District and the City have a good working relationship and cooperate in many areas such as security/police, traffic, recreation, and overall quality of life issues. These are noted following.

Based on the success of the Cops in Schools Program, the City's Police Department should continue a police presence in the schools. While a grant program initially funded this position on behalf of the Cortland Police Department, eventually these funds were expended over the course of four years and the City could not afford to continue to provide this service to the District. In the 2009 budget, the School District included this position based on the success of the program.



The City Police Department and the School District should work with neighborhoods to expand the Neighborhood Watch Programs, with a particular emphasis on getting children to school safely.

For a number of years, the City and the School District have desired to create an emergency response center/shelter including the School District's Smith School and the Armory building on Wheeler Avenue, which the City owns. The State sold the armory building to the City a number of years ago and the City has utilized it for security and training, storage of police physical evidence, and as a temporary station for the Fire Department, to name just a few of its uses. The Smith School would house those needing shelter and the Armory would be a staging area for responders. The main cost for this project is putting a generator online (this is the hospital's old generator that was sold to the City for \$1). The City has received funding from NYS Assemblyperson Barbara Lifton and Senator James Seward for this project. The School has included its costs into a capital project which the voters have approved. The Armory/Smith School project is expected to commence in 2010. The City and School District will need to refine this project and execute an intermunicipal agreement as it moves forward.

There is a student housing complex located near the athletic fields of Barry Elementary School. These apartments have balconies where students have engaged in behaviors that are not conducive to a safe learning environment. Incompatible uses within sight of local elementary schools should be visually buffered.

## **OTHER ISSUES**

There is a lack of athletic field space in the City and there are not enough athletic fields for the School District. Some of the need for additional space has been satisfied by the newly completed Ted Testa Park located on the City's borders in the Town of Cortlandville. The City Youth Bureau has been hired to manage the park on the Town's behalf. Since the School District and City do not have enough field space, they should continue the policy of cooperating on the combined use of City parks and City athletic fields,

The City and the School District also have the opportunity to cooperate with one another on issues such as energy conservation, cooperative fuel purchases, recycling, etc. Not only does this further energy conservation goals on a local, State, and national level, it is a means for the two entities to cost share as well.



## GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

**GOAL 29:** Encourage the creation of housing units in the City that are attractive to and desired by school district faculty and staff.

### IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Work with the school on developing/identifying housing programs that encourage teachers and school staff to reside and seek homeownership in the City of Cortland.
- B) When the City acquires property for back taxes, develop a program to facilitate purchase of said properties by owner occupants, particularly young professionals such as teachers.

**GOAL 30:** Consider the impact of new development on individual City elementary schools.

### IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) The creation of new housing, particularly dense developments of affordable housing, should consider the impact on local elementary schools. Include the school district as part of the planning/development process.
- B) Conflicting uses within sight of local elementary schools should be visually buffered, e.g., the student housing complex located next to the athletic fields at Barry Elementary School.

**GOAL 31:** Provide students with job/volunteering opportunities in the local community.

### IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Partner with the school district so that students can work for pay or meet community service requirements in City businesses, government, or not-for-profit organizations.
- B) Partner with the school district, job training program providers, and area employers to develop programs so that job training in the schools match the skill sets needed by area businesses.



**GOAL 32:** Continue to improve the main gateways to the high school so that they are attractive to prospective/existing students, and faculty and staff.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Continue work on South Main Street and the greater South End Neighborhood to improve the gateway to the junior/high school.
- B) Work with the School to improve the safety and appearance of Valley View Drive.

**GOAL 33:** Improve the City's transportation network to benefit students and faculty/staff.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Work with the school and the County to explore the possibility of using the public bus transportation system for school uses.
- B) Continue to work with the school district on identifying and improving the City's sidewalk, trail, and road network to encourage more children and staff to walk or ride their bicycles to school.
- C) Improve crosswalks and signage where needed.
- D) Continue working with the County and school on safety and health programs, including but not limited to, use of bicycle helmets and walking/biking City trails and sidewalks to take advantage of their health benefits. Encourage the installation of bicycle racks where appropriate.

**GOAL 34:** Expand the City's safety resources to protect and benefit the school district.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Based on the success of the existing Cops in Schools Program, the City's Police Department should continue a police presence in the schools. This should include not only police personnel but expanded training opportunities for police, staff, and students and acquiring up-to-date equipment and technology as well.
- B) Work with neighborhoods to expand the Neighborhood Watch Program, with a particular emphasis on getting children to and from school safely.
- C) Continue to monitor/control traffic in and around the district school buildings, particularly at arrival/dismissal times.



- D) Continue work with the school district on making the Armory and Smith School a designated emergency shelter and responder site.

**GOAL 35:** Consolidate City and school district services and facilities as a cost savings measure.

**IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:**

- A) Continue the relationship with the school district and Cortland Youth Bureau regarding the use of athletic field space, programs, and facilities and the development of new venues.
- B) Identify/implement other cost savings measures that would be mutually beneficial for the school district and the City, including but not limited to, partnering on grant opportunities, bulk purchases, use of school facilities for community events, and recycling and energy conservation efforts.

