**Cortland Area Communities That Care Literacy Coalition**

**Cortland County, New York**

*Population 25k-50k (49,024)*

**Six School Districts:**

* **Cortland Enlarged City Schools**
	+ 2,559 students in K-12 (2014-2015)
	+ 52% on free and reduced-price lunch
* **Marathon Central Schools**
	+ 707 students in K-12 (2014-2015)
	+ 52% on free and reduced-price lunch
* **McGraw Central Schools**
	+ 534 students in K-12 (2014-2015)
	+ 53% on free and reduced-price lunch
* **Cincinnatus Central Schools**
	+ 566 students in K-12 (2014-2015)
	+ 56% on free and reduced-price lunch
* **Homer Central Schools**
	+ 2,055 students in K-12 (2014-2015)
	+ 37% on free and reduced-price lunch
* **DeRuyter Central Schools**
	+ 425 students in K-12 (2014-2015)
	+ 29.6% on free and reduced-price lunch

**Names and Affiliations:** See attachment

**Funder:** Central New York Community Foundation

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**Summary Overview**

In May 2010, the Annie E. Casey Foundation published a KIDS COUNT special report, *Early Warning:* *Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters,* to launch the national Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. *Early Warning* summarized the research basis for focusing on grade-level reading proficiency as an essential step toward increasing the number of children who succeed academically, graduate from high school on time and do well in life and the workforce.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Falling behind can lead to bad grades, disengaging from school and eventually dropping out. Children who aren’t reading at grade level by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school[[2]](#footnote-2) than those who reach that benchmark. Every student who does not complete high school costs our society an estimated $260,000 in lost earnings, taxes and productivity.[[3]](#footnote-3) These findings present a strong call to action and are part of the fuel that has helped launch the Cortland Area Communities That Care (CACTC) Literacy Coalition.

Cortland Area Communities That Care (CACTC) is a non-profit community coalition whose mission is to reduce adolescent alcohol and other drug abuse, teen pregnancy, delinquency, school dropout rates, and violence in the community. With over 40 coalition partners from 12 sectors[[4]](#footnote-4) of the community, CACTC is on the frontlines in addressing some of our community’s most pressing issues for over a decade.

Cortland County has a longstanding history of collaboration. Over the years, we have seen ever increasing collaboration among multiple sectors including: health and human services, local government, education, economic/community development, business, community service, and the like. The coalition model has been utilized by many organizations and initiatives in Cortland County. Such collaboration allows us to make efficient use of scarce resources to bring about community-level change. Our children’s well-being is ultimately dependent upon the willingness and ability of all community sectors to work together.

CACTC is excited to spearhead this new Literacy Coalition. We fundamentally believe that only by widening our strategic approach, working together, and pooling resources, can we fund and implement systemic changes to bring about significant community change. We are in the process of joining the Annie E. Casey Foundation Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. This national effort has a big goal: By 2020 it hopes to increase the number of children from low-income families reading proficiently at the end of third grade by 100%.

Local stakeholders are looking forward to using other campaign communities as models for what can be accomplished here in Cortland County. We plan to capitalize on the groundswell of public and private sector commitment to work together to develop long-term improvement in community literacy. The ultimate goal is to create a community culture of literacy that prepares children for school, ensures they attend regularly and able to achieve measurable basic skill mastery in the pursuit of high school graduation and life-long success.

This Community Solutions Action Plan (CSAP) was developed by the Cortland Area Communities That Care (CACTC) Literacy Coalition as part of the process of joining the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. With its more than 13 years of collaboration with area schools, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and service providers, CACTC serves as the organizational leader and backbone organization of the Cortland County Literacy Coalition. We are partnering with the Central New York Community Foundation, which is championing this initiative and providing the Literacy Coalition with initial funding and support.

Part One: Community Overview

Cortland County is located in the geographical center of New York State, and is the northernmost area of the Appalachian-designated counties in the United States. Its total population is 49,024 persons (2014 Census).[[5]](#footnote-5) Cortland county is primarily rural, with the City of Cortland (population 19,204) surrounded by three villages – Homer, Marathon and McGraw – and fifteen townships: the towns of Cincinnatus, Cortlandville, Cuyler, Freetown, Harford, Homer, Lapeer, Marathon, Preble, Scott, Solon, Taylor, Truxton, Virgil and Willet. There are five school districts within Cortland County including Cortland Enlarged City Schools, Marathon Central Schools, McGraw Central Schools, Cincinnatus Central Schools and Homer Central Schools. DeRuyter Schools, located in Madison County, is also being included in this Literacy Coalition as the district includes students from both Cortland and Madison County.

Most of the population of Cortland County lives in a narrow, developed area along Interstate 81 on the western side of the county. Agriculture remains the primary industry across much of the county. The State University of New York at Cortland (SUNY Cortland), which enrolls over 7,000 students and is the largest employer in Cortland County, lies in the center of the City of Cortland. Subtle cultural differences exist from one small rural agricultural community to another, especially between the rural areas and the population center surrounding the City of Cortland. Within the City of Cortland, there are distinct cultural difference between the College population and the community at large.

Cortland County has a racially homogeneous population. Current census figures indicate that 95% of the residents are white, non-Hispanic; 2.6% are Hispanic and 1.9% are Black (2014 Census). A variety of measures consistently show that Cortland is a poor county with low per capita income and high unemployment rates compared to the rest of Central New York. The portion of the population under the age of 18 is 19.6%.[[6]](#footnote-6) The percentage of children living below the poverty line (22.3%) in the county exceeds the comparable figures for Upstate New York (17.5%). Cortland County was significantly impacted by the recession in 2008-2009, and recovery has been slow with employment rates gradually rebounding to pre-recession levels. However, the County’s unemployment rate (7.10% in January 2016) consistently ranks among the highest in the region, and is above the state average. Based on other indicators of health and well-being, Cortland County is not faring well. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s 2015 Community Health Rankings places Cortland 48th among the 62 New York counties in overall health outcomes indicators. The County is ranked 32nd on social and economic factors (which include education, employment, income, family and social support) contributing to poor health outcomes.

In its heyday, Cortland was a thriving manufacturing community. Unfortunately, industrial retrenchment in Cortland County began in the late 1970ʼs and continues to plague the Cortland County community, even today. The community has suffered greatly as local companies have closed, relocated, or consolidated out of the area. The County never recaptured all of its former manufacturing jobs.[[7]](#footnote-7) On top of this, Cortland County ranks 6th in the country in terms of property taxes as a percentage of home value.[[8]](#footnote-8)

According to Cortland County Department of Social Services (DSS) data, the number of Public Assistance (TANF) cases has grown from 494 in November 30, 2012, to 580 as of November 30, 2015, an increase 17.4 percent.[[9]](#footnote-9) Single women with children under the age of five have the highest rate of poverty in the county at 69.1 percent. This rate is much higher than for similar families in the U.S. (47.0%) and New York State (40.7%).[[10]](#footnote-10)

While the majority (90.1%) of Cortland County residents over age 25 have a high school diploma or higher, just 22.7 percent of them have attained a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared with 33.7 percent across New York State. Some 36.5 percent have a high school diploma or equivalent, while 18.4 percent have some college but no degree and another 12.5 percent have an associate’s degree. The remaining 10 percent has less than 9th grade education or some high school (grades 9–12) with no degree. Unsurprisingly, median income levels rise with levels of educational attainment in the county and poverty is concentrated among those with lower levels of education.[[11]](#footnote-11) An estimated 11 percent of Cortland County adults lack basic prose literacy skills, according to the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (the most recent study available).[[12]](#footnote-12) Only 18% of students in Cortland County in 2014 and 2015 tested “proficient” in reading by the end of third grade.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Other factors plague our community, including drug abuse and mental health issues. The Upstate New York Poison Center received 10 calls from Cortland County healthcare institutions reporting heroin exposure from January through October 2014, the highest rate in Upstate counties.

Part Two: The Community Solution Action Plan

**The Problem (Assurance #1)**

Key stakeholders in Cortland County, including local government, school districts, non-profit service providers, and funders are working together to find, own and implement evidence-based solutions to the challenges that prevent our young people from meeting critical milestones on their path to success. Fundamental to this is the blending of those existing efforts into a single, more cohesive approach.

**Median Household Income**

Many of our challenges are tied to economic hardship and poverty. In New York State, schools are funded on a property tax-based system. This system hurts areas with less business and property assets, especially our rural communities. Therefore, poor and rural areas, like Cortland County, tend to be very dependent on state aid. The following table provides a breakdown of the median household income for each school district in the county. The Cortland City School District has the lowest median household income out of the six school districts in the county; its average is over $15,000 less than that of Homer’s, which has the highest average income.

**Table 1:** Median Household Income by School District[[14]](#footnote-14)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cortland School District** | **Median Household Income** |
| Cincinnatus | $40,714 |
| City of Cortland | $38,841 |
| Homer | $56,696 |
| Marathon | $49,391 |
| McGraw | $52,216 |
| DeRuyter | $49,042 |

**High School Graduation**

The wealth disparity is reflected in data relating to student achievement. Not surprisingly, the Cortland City School District has the lowest graduation rate (68%), while Homer has one of the highest rates (89%). This correlates to the median household incomes as mentioned above. This reinforces the notion that low-income areas lack adequate resources and support, resulting in negative student outcomes.

**Figure 1:** Cortland County Graduation Rates[[15]](#footnote-15)

As **Figure 1** shows, our county-wide high school graduation rate is above average. The state graduation average for rural schools is 83%. Cortland County’s average is 84%. Graduation rates have not varied significantly over the last several years. The graduation rate for every school district was less than the percentage of the population with a high school degree or higher.

**Grade-Level Reading at 3rd Grade**

We know that one of the most important predictors of high school graduation is the ability to read at grade level by 3rd grade. As seen in **Table 2** and **3**, Cortland County’s scores are lower in both 3rd grade reading (NYS ELA) and 3rd grade math proficiency than the New York State averages (32 % and 42% respectively).

**Table 2:** 2013-2014 Grade 3 ELA Results**[[16]](#footnote-16)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **School** | **Below Proficient** | **Partially Proficient** | **Proficient** | **Above Proficient** |
| Hartnett Elementary School | 65% | 24% | 12% | 0% |
| William Appleby Elementary School | 65% | 23% | 12% | 0% |
| Randall School | 61% | 25% | 14% | 0% |
| Cincinnatus Elementary School | 56% | 29% | 13% | 2% |
| McGraw Elementary School | 54% | 31% | 14% | 0% |
| F E Smith School | 54% | 29% | 18% | 0% |
| Virgil Elementary School | 50% | 27% | 23% | 0% |
| Homer Intermediate School | 44% | 33% | 21% | 3% |
| Alton B Parker School | 56% | 20% | 24% | 0% |
| Franklyn S Barry School | 36% | 38% | 27% | 0% |
| DeRuyter Elementary School | 48% | 30% | 21% | 0% |
| **Cortland County Average** | **54%** | **28%** | **18%** | **0%** |
|  | *82% are below proficient* | *18% are proficient* |
| **New York State Average**  |  |  | **32%** |  |

In every school, with the exception of the Franklyn S. Barry School, the large majority of students tested *below proficient* for grade level reading.

**Table 3:** 2013-2014 Grade 3 Math Results[[17]](#footnote-17)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **School** | **Below Proficient** | **Partially Proficient** | **Proficient** | **Above Proficient** |
| Virgil Elementary School | 40% | 55% | 5% | 0% |
| Randall School | 50% | 34% | 14% | 2% |
| William Appleby Elementary School | 48% | 32% | 20% | 0% |
| McGraw Elementary School | 58% | 21% | 21% | 0% |
| Alton B Parker School | 28% | 49% | 18% | 5% |
| Cincinnatus Elementary School | 35% | 42% | 15% | 8% |
| F E Smith School | 34% | 34% | 17% | 14% |
| Hartnett Elementary School | 33% | 33% | 22% | 11% |
| Homer Intermediate School | 19% | 40% | 25% | 15% |
| Franklyn S Barry School | 29% | 24% | 27% | 20% |
| DeRuyter Elementary School | 41% | 31% | 22% | 6% |
| **Cortland County Average** | **38%** | **36%** | **19%** | **7%** |
|  | *74% are below proficient* | *26% are proficient* |
| **New York State Average** |  |  | **42%** |  |

In most schools, the large majority of students tested *below proficient* for Third Grade math.

**Attendance**

Many of the schools in Cortland County are struggling with attendance issues and chronic absenteeism (10% or more of excused and unexcused absences). The smaller rural schools have an easier time tracking and taking action because they have so few students that it is easier for them to notice an issue and take action. Homer and Cortland, the two largest school districts in the county, both have concerns over their absences. They are collaborating with Cortland County Social Services and Probation Departments to address this issue.

**Table 4:** County-wideChronic Absences by Grade[[18]](#footnote-18)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Grade Level | Students With Chronic Absence | Total # In Grade Level | % Chronic Absent in Grade Level |
| K | 47 | 496 | 9% |
| 1 | 37 | 553 | 7% |
| 2 | 36 | 500 | 7% |
| 3 | 33 | 498 | 7% |
| 4 | 35 | 515 | 7% |
| 5 | 35 | 507 | 7% |
| 6 | 36 | 444 | 8% |
| 7 | 68 | 516 | 13% |
| 8 | 84 | 537 | 16% |
| 9 | 78 | 520 | 15% |
| 10 | 87 | 510 | 17% |
| 11 | 80 | 497 | 16% |
| 12 | 127 | 520 | 24% |

7% of Elementary School students are chronically absent in the county (153 students).

**Summer Learning Loss**

Decades of research have documented the presence of summer learning loss and its cumulative effect on reading proficiency. By the end of summer, students perform, on average, one month to 2 months behind where they left off in the spring.[[19]](#footnote-19) The CACTC Literacy Coalition would like to establish a baseline in order to better reflect future student gains and losses. There are many students who do not participate in summer enrichment activities and those are often those in most need.

**Adult Learning**

According to the 2014 American Community Survey, 9.8% of adults over 25 years of age in Cortland County (2,934 people) do not have a high school diploma. Of those, 872 left school before the ninth grade.[[20]](#footnote-20) Of people over 25 without a diploma, 24% are living in poverty.[[21]](#footnote-21)  (The actual number without a diploma is higher since the data does not include youth and young adults who are between 16 and 25 who left high school at the time of the survey.)  Adults who were unable to complete high school are at a disadvantage in today’s job market, where many employers require a high school diploma. Lack of education and poverty are often linked in a vicious cycle. Many of these adults struggle with basic reading, math, and writing skills needed to hold steady jobs or advance. They may have vision issues or undiagnosed learning disabilities. In a rural county they may have transportation issues, child care issues, and erratic work schedules that inhibit ability to attend standard programs. However, these adults often have skills and knowledge in areas not measured by standard tests, and they still have educational goals and dreams. Cortland County has four types of adult learners with literacy needs or goals: (1) adults seeking high school diplomas, (2) adults with life-skills or educational goals, whose reading and math skills are below fifth or sixth grade, (3) adults learning English as a Second Language, and (4) adults with low math or reading skills who want to help their children and/ or grandchildren learn.

**Desired Outcomes and Impact (Assurance #2)**

The overarching goal of the Cortland Area Communities That Care (CACTC) Literacy Coalition is to create a culture of literacy in Cortland County that supports persons of all ages.

The Literacy Coalition will strive to achieve the following goals:

* Increase school readiness for incoming kindergarten students.
* Increase the number of parents and children participating in literacy programs (i.e. Books to Grow On, Imagination Library, Vroom).
* Decrease the number of students that are chronically absent (students missing 10% of school days or more).
* Increase the number of parents engaged in strategies to reduce chronic absence.
* Increase the number of children that have access to nutritious food during the summer and throughout the school year.
* Increase the number children receiving access to adequate oral health services.
* Increase the number of parents engaged in strategies to improve oral health.
* Decrease the number of children experiencing summer learning loss and the amount of summer learning loss per student.
* Increase high school graduation rates and the number of those who have dropped-out who receive high school diplomas.
* Increase the number of adult learners enrolled in tutoring and other educational programs.
* Increase the number of adult learners meeting their learning goals.

**The Strategy (Assurance #3)**

To accomplish the above mentioned goals, we will continue to work to build membership in the Cortland Area Communities That Care (CACTC) Literacy Coalition. Concurrently, efforts will be directed toward increasing the capacity of the community to address literacy needs by strengthening existing partnerships and programs, and helping to coordinate the work of entities already engaged in improving literacy in Cortland County.

The Literacy Coalition will follow the collective impact model, having: a common agenda, shared measurements, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and the presence of a backbone organization (CACTC) to manage these efforts.

Building on the existing infrastructure of CACTC, our approach to addressing attendance, school readiness, summer learning, and adult learning will focus on the following overarching strategies:

* Coordination of data collection and evaluation
* Coordination and enhancement of existing programs
* Development and communication of countywide literacy awareness and education campaigns
* Coordination of literacy workgroups that include: Attendance, School Readiness, Summer Learning, Adult Learning, and Measurement and Assessment. These workgroups will bring together necessary stakeholders to implement the individual strategies listed below.

The current structure of the Literacy Coalition is as follows:

Coalition Director

CACTC

Board of Directors

Leadership Team

Literacy Coordinator

School Attendance

Adult

Learning

School Readiness

Summer

Learning

Measurement

1. **School Attendance Workgroup Priorities**
2. **Data Collection**

Through the collection and tracking of countywide attendance data, the CACTC Literacy Coalition, schools and community partners will be able to develop and implement targeted interventions for students that are most at risk.

1. Develop and maintain a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with each Cortland County school district to include the collection and tracking of countywide attendance data. Data will be collected on a quarterly basis and aggregated yearly.
2. Gathered and Assessed data will include:
	1. Overall attendance percentage
	2. Percentage of chronically absent students (chronic absence is defined as missing 10% or more of school days excused or unexcused)
3. Coordinate the adoption and use of the Attendance Works District Attendance Tracking Tool (DATT) by all schools.
4. **Communication and Awareness**

The CACTC Literacy Coalition will work with partner organizations to develop education and awareness materials to promote the importance of attendance in Cortland County. As part of this effort, the Literacy Coalition will help coordinate the New York State *Every Student Present* Campaign. The Coalition, Cortland County School Districts, and New York State Council on Children and Families are partnering to promote the *Every Student Present* Campaign throughout Cortland County. Every Student Present is an awareness campaign to help parents of young children learn about the detrimental effect that multiple absences have on their children’s school success. Promotion of the campaign has already started as of September 2015 with the distribution of materials (posters and bookmarks) throughout the community to locations that include schools, businesses, doctor’s offices, and nonprofit partners.

1. **Coordination and Enhancement of Existing Programs**

The primary focus of the Literacy Coalition’s planning will involve the coordination and enhancement of existing programs and services that will help improve attendance outcomes of students in Cortland County. As such, the Literacy Coalition, spearheaded by the Attendance Workgroup chaired by Chris Driscoll of DSS, is actively supporting and/or participating in the following efforts:

**Cortland Hunger Coalition**

The Cortland Hunger Coalition is a group of concerned community members committed to identifying and addressing the issues of hunger in Cortland County. The work of the Hunger Coalition addresses two main issues. The first is recognizing the significant hunger issues in our community; identifying resources available to help people meet their needs for healthy, nutritious food and helping them access food. The second is educating the community about the issues of hunger and working to address the systemic reasons that hunger exists. The Hunger Coalition is represented by a diverse group of community members including school personnel, staff of local human services and not for profits, County Legislators, local DSS representatives, farmers, health professionals, Health Department staff, local Food Bank representatives, food pantry staff and volunteers and other members of the community. The Summer Learning Action Team is working to incorporate reading into the Summer Feeding Programs run by Catholic Charities during the summer.

**Cavity Free Cortland**

Cavity Free Cortland is a community-driven initiative to develop, implement, and evaluate a local action plan to improve dental health in Cortland County. It is comprised of community stakeholders who recognize the importance of promoting dental health in the county. The group has been working since December 2014 to build upon programs and utilize resources already in place, and to formulate intervention strategies and draft goals and objectives for a community-wide plan. Currently, some of the group’s goals include increasing the use of fluoride varnish applications in pediatric and dental offices, continuing and increasing the use of the Cavity Free Kids curriculum in daycare, preschool, home visits, and other early learning programs, and working with schools to increase awareness and education on the importance of dental health in the overall health of children. The stakeholder group has been working directly with the NYS Oral Health Center of Excellence for trainings and technical assistance. This initiative is a part of New York State’s Prevention Agenda Action Plan.

**Partnership between Cortland County Department of Social Services (DSS) and Probation, and the Cortland and Homer School Districts**

The Attendance Workgroup (chaired by Chris Driscoll of DSS), so as not to duplicate efforts is looking for support and build off of the work already accomplished through the effective partnership between DSS, Probation and local school districts. Here is some of what had come out of the previous partnership:

Removal of Student from Regular Attendance: The school districts were struggling with the number of students being placed on out-of-school tutoring by physicians with little communication to schools and minimal re-integration planning. They developed a form for physicians to complete when taking a student out of regular instruction and placing them in out-of-school tutoring. The form has already helped the school districts reduce the number of students being placed on out of school tutoring. All of the districts within Cortland County endorsed this procedure and a copy of the letter that was sent from the districts to the physicians is also attached. This has resulted in a decline in long-term leaves from school.

Trauma Informed Care: Systems of Care partnered with Cortland, Homer, and Marathon school district to offer the Trauma Informed Care training at Cortland High School. A total of about 100 members from all of the school districts and various agencies (Probation, DSS and others) attended. This training started to lay some of the framework for our agencies to work together more frequently to meet the needs of families within the community.

Creative Brainstorming Workgroup Report: The report highlights some of the changes made to each agency's policies and procedures. It highlights the goals for a collaborative attendance procedure and promotes the importance of regular school attendance.

General Release: The Department of Social Services general release form was amended to include a section that will allow all open DSS Preventive Services and Cortland County Coordinated Children’s Services Initiative (CCSI) families to be shared with Cortland School Social Workers on a monthly case list. This case list is divided by.school and is sent to the school social worker only. This process is being done to improve communication between school staff, DSS, and CCSI Parent Partners to be better able to meet the needs of the families and improve school attendance. This philosophy also aligns with the Trauma Informed Communities approach to assisting families. This process is being piloted with Cortland Schools at this time, in the hopes that it might be expanded to the other districts.

Joint Services Referral: The joint services referral was created so that one referral could be completed by families or providers when attempting to get DSS Preventive Services, CCSI services, or Liberty Resources (In-home Family Therapy). This was done to create an easier ability to access services. One referral can be completed rather than a family or provider having to complete multiple referrals for each program. This group will be discussing whether there is an ability to roll the Single Point of Access (SPOA) application for Intensive Case Management and Hillside Waiver services into this same document. This would essentially create one referral form for the vast majority of youth based services within the community. This approach also aligns closely with a community wide trauma informed approach.

1. **School Readiness Workgroup Priorities**

The CACTC Literacy Coalition is interested in working with early childhood service providers and school districts to create a coordinated continuum for school readiness. To accomplish this, CACTC will share best practices with Coalition partners. The School Readiness Workgroup has discussed the possibility of collecting data from schools to create baseline data for school readiness. The workgroup is looking to other communities to see how it might approach this. In the meantime, the group is looking to implement programs to increase school readiness.

1. **Communication and Awareness**
* Spread awareness of available parent resources (e.g., Library programs, free book programs, and other enrichment activities)
* Offer education opportunities for parents so they can better prepare their children for school and its expectations
* Increase the number “Read To Me” banners visible throughout the community
1. **Vroom**

The Literacy Coalition will pilot the implementation of the Vroom program. Vroom offers strategies for parents and caregivers to make everyday moments with children brain building activities. Through a free mobile app and Vroom tools, parents are put at the center of their child’s development and school readiness. As part of the pilot program, CACTC will partner with an existing program (such as a Head Start classroom) to evaluate the effectiveness of the Vroom strategies. These strategies include:

1. Look: Make eye contact so you and your child are looking at each other
2. Chat: Talk about the things you see, hear, and do together
3. Follow: Take your child’s lead by responding to their sounds and actions
4. Stretch: Make each moment with your child longer
5. Take Turns: With sounds, words, faces, and actions

After an evaluation of the program is completed, if successful, The Coalition will help implement Vroom through early child care providers and Head Start.

1. **Increase Availability of Books**

The CACTC Literacy Coalition will support two existing programs that seek to provide young children with books from birth to age 5.

**1. Cortland Family Reading Partnership**

CACTC has partnered with the Cortland Family Reading Partnership since 2008, serving as the fiscal agent for the Books to Grow On program and sponsoring “Read to Me” banners across the community. We will continue to work with the Family Reading Partnership to strengthen programs they currently offer. There is interest from Workgroup members to also help them expand their current programs in the county and increase the number of books in the hands of children in children:

* Books at Birth: All families receive a book (The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle) as a gift in the hospital when their baby is born.
* Books to Grow On: At well visits from 2 months to 4 years, families receive a book as a gift from their healthcare provider, complete with prescription to read to their baby.
* Welcome to School Book: Schools help to pay a small fee for a book that Kindergarten families receive at registration or upon entering Kindergarten to welcome them to school.
* Give the Gift of Family Reading: Holiday book drive provides low income families with new books to give to their children as gifts for the holidays. Books are sorted by age level and are dispensed with food baskets at The Salvation Army, Catholic Charities and Loaves and Fishes.
* The Bright Red Bookshelf: Gently used children’s books are donated through various sources. These books are made available, free for families on shelves in over 20 locations, such as the YWCA, Price Chopper and Loaves and Fishes.
* “Read to Me” Banners: All across the community banners with colorful images of reading together encourage and inspire families to read to their children. This program will require continual funding in order to replace tattered banners and find locations for new placements.
	1. **The Dolly Parton Imagination Library**

Through this program, books are mailed directly to a participating child's home every month. This means a baby who joins at birth can potentially end up with his/her own personal library of 60 books. The Cortland Free Library (CFL) kicked off this program in fall 2015 by offering it to children from birth to age 5 whose parent/guardians lives in zip code 13045. With the generous matching contributions from the Dolllywood Foundation, our local cost is only $2.50/book including mailing and administration costs. The local funds for year one have been raised. CFL’s goal is to have 168 children participating by the end of year one, and 840 children participating by the end of year five. The Literacy Coalition’s goal is to involve all communities in Cortland County and expand eligibility county-wide.

1. **Coordinating and Aligning with Existing Programs**

**Head Start: CAPCO**

The Early Head Start (EHS) program is for low-income infants, toddlers, pregnant women, and their families. EHS programs promote healthy prenatal outcomes, enhance the development of very young children, and promote healthy family functioning. Head Start provides a pre-school program for 3 to 5 year old children at no cost to eligible families.

**Child Development Council**

We will work with the Child Development Council to implement programing through childcare providers that aligns with the goals and requirements of Head Start and Universal Pre-K to prepare students for Kindergarten. This programming will be designed to prepare children for Kindergarten. CACTC helped to bring the Incredible Years curriculum to Cortland County between 2005-2010.The Coalition could assist in the same way if an appropriate and effective program is identified.

**SUNY Cortland Literacy Department/Early Childhood Development Department**

SUNY Cortland staff will assist with evaluation of new and existing programs such as the Dolly Parton Imagination Library.

**Early Intervention Services - Cortland County Health Dept.**

Provides developmental screenings, evaluations and appropriate services for children from birth to age 3 with a developmental disability or delay.

**Universal Pre-K**

Cortland City School District offers a free Universal Pre-K program for eligible 4 year olds in the district through collaboration with area day care centers. It is a half day program, 3 hours per day, provided 5 days per week following the district calendar. There are currently 10 approved sites in Cortland including: CAPCO Head Start at Smith, Randall and Parker, Cortland County Child Development Center, Franziska Racker Center, YMCA, YWCA Nursery and Day School, YWCA Here We Grow Child Care Center, YWCA Learning Adventure Child Care Center, SUNY Cortland Child Care Center. Each individual site also has program directors.

**Family Development Program: CAPCO**

Family Development works with people in the community to develop and provide resources and supports to encourage strong, healthy families. There is an emphasis on asset development to include budgeting, fiscal literacy, nutrition, life skills, family essentials, and parent support and education through Parents With Hope groups. There will be opportunities to strengthen these interventions (i.e., Family Development, Model Moms, Parenting Wisely) with the many tools and resources highlighted or promoted by the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading designed to support parent success.

Parents With Hope is a family life education and support group for parents with children of all ages from pregnancy on up. Participants get to decide what they want to learn and strengthen. Anything goes! Topics may include but are not limited to communication, step-parenting, addiction, discipline, sibling rivalry, child safety. Childcare and dinner or snack provided.

**Model Moms: YWCA**

Model Moms is a free parenting program that provides support and companionship to moms of all ages providing a holistic approach to parenting. This approach includes exercise, nutrition, food preparation, family budgeting, and good parenting techniques in a comfortable and social environment.

**Parenting Wisely: Cortland Prevention Resources**

Free computer-based program developed to increase positive communication and decrease conflict in families. The program discusses mindful parenting, monitoring and supervision. There is a young children’s version for 3-9 year olds and teen version for 10-18 year olds.

1. **Summer Learning Workgroup Priorities**

The CACTC Literacy Coalition is in the process of collecting both quantitative (data regarding summer learning loss from evaluations) and qualitative (information from teachers regarding the skills and areas of biggest need for students) information from Cortland County school districts. Once established, this baseline data will help guide the efforts of the Coalition and its partners to address summer learning loss.

Our summer learning strategies will focus on increasing the number of children participating in high quality summer programming, that feature programming to improve/support literacy levels and provide summer meals

Cortland County already has a wide variety of summer programing offered by partner organizations. However, like many programs in small rural communities these programs face a variety of barriers: transportation, limited space, and lack of knowledge in the community about available programs.

To address some of these issues, The Summer Learning Workgroup conducted a survey of partners to assess the current landscape of summer programing. As part of the survey, we assessed available programs on how many youth they serve, length of program, educational components, availability of lunch or breakfast, cost of program, availability of scholarships, and whether programs would like to offer additional enrichment activities. We received responses from 18 different entities. Over 50% had a literacy component of some sort. Many respondents (77.8%) said they would be interested in adding a literacy/educational component to their programs. Most programs (66.7%) do not have a fee for participation in their program. Some of those (35.3%) who charge said they provided scholarships.

1. **Coordinating and Enhancing Existing Programs**

**All 5 Cortland County Libraries** offer summer programing. We will work to enhance the programing already available through the libraries and create linkages with other summer programs such as the summer lunch program administered by Catholic Charities of Cortland County.

In order to help promote the summer programming already available, the CACTC Literacy Coalition will work with partners and school to create and promote a directory of services and programs.

1. **Filling Gaps**

In addition, we will provide resources and information to parents based on information from teachers on the skills and activities parents can work on with their children through the summer to prevent summer learning loss. We will also provide partners with resources from the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.

The Summer Learning Workgroup is in the process of creating a pilot volunteer reading/tutor program during the summer. This program will build upon the successful mentoring and tutoring programs already available in the community through the Cortland YWCA and Cortland Prevention Resources.

1. **Adult Learning Workgroup Priorities**

The Adult Learning Workgroup focused on the needs and resources available to adults who do not have a high school diploma and / or who have struggled with reading or math themselves. Many are parents who may not know how to support and enhance their children’s learning. The group identified four main segments – each with different needs and delivery issues.

1. **Enhancement of Existing Programs**

Literacy Volunteers of Cortland County: Our priority issue is expansion of the R.S.V.P. Literacy Volunteer of Cortland County program. Although Cortland County has two programs available to adults who are working towards their High School Equivalency diploma (OCM BOCES and CAPCO) and one program for adults needing English as a Second Language (Community Center ESL), the county has had a major gap in services for adults whose academic skill level is below fifth or sixth grade and who have a variety of individual learning goals. These adults usually need one-on-one tutoring to address specific needs. A small group of dedicated volunteers has been working through R.S.V.P. (the senior volunteer organization), but that group is only able to serve a few adults. Expansion of the program requires a different infrastructure.

Through the efforts of the existing R.S.V.P. volunteers and the CACTC Adult Learning Workgroup, CAPCO has agreed to provide office space and additional office support for the two R.S.V.P. volunteer co-ordinators, as well as work with partners to seek sustainable funding. OCM BOCES has agreed to provide formal training for the volunteer tutors. The CACTC Adult Learner Workgroup has agreed to serve as advisors to the program. CAPCO staff and RSVP volunteers are currently working on developing the foundation necessary to increase outreach to adult learners and the recruitment of volunteer tutors.

Adult Learners as Parents. For Adult Learner parents with children in the ages targeted by the Campaign for Grade Level Reading, the Adult Learner programs will work with our students to adopt materials and participate in local programs designed to help them help their children attain grade level reading.

1. **Communication**

Many adult learners are referred to programs from other agencies. The team identified a lack of knowledge among referral agencies about existing Adult Learning programs, as well as a wide level of confusion about changes in New York State’s High School Equivalency Diploma testing. The Literacy Coalition’s Adult Learning Workgroup will develop questions to be used in focus groups with adult learners in existing programs to gain insight into how to improve communication strategies about current services. This will provide insight useful for adult learners and referral agencies.

1. **Data Development**

The team is working a developing a set of goals and easy-to-use progress measures for tutors and students in the Volunteer Tutor program. These measures will be designed to connect with progress measures commonly used by adult education funding sources.

1. **Measurement Workgroup Priorities**

The Measurement Workgroup’s main priority has been to design an assessment plan and infrastructure that will portray the current state of literacy outlined in this document to the future desired state of literacy for all groups targeted by Coalition efforts. Valid and reliable assessment tools will need to be selected for use in gathering dashboard data. Comprehensive dashboards will need to be created to monitor the effects of various efforts on various groups over time. This may require some innovative measurements not thought of at this point. A good deal of measurement by necessity will lie in maintaining collaborative relationships with schools/agencies and data sharing and accessibility across sectors. Communication and coordination of sharing of reports will be essential for success and will promote shared responsibility for outcomes.

**Connecting for Synergy (Assurance #4)**

Cortland County has a longstanding history of collaboration among organizations, and this collaboration has further increased since the formation of Cortland Area Communities That Care Coalition (CACTC). The Coalition’s dedicated and involved members are individuals from prominent community agencies and organizations that have collaborated on a wide variety of projects and activities to benefit the Cortland community over time. CACTC serves as the leader and backbone organization of the Cortland County Literacy Initiative, leveraging more than 10 years of collaboration with area schools, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and service providers.

In addition to the strong history of collaboration, Cortland County and the Coalition have significant experience in assessment and evaluation. Community leaders participate in "Cortland Counts." Since 2000, this collaborative process determines community needs, establishes goals and priorities, and provides objective data for evaluating progress. This process helps local agencies and organizations meet their individual missions, coordinate long-term planning, and promote efficient use of limited resources to promote well-being and enhance quality of life in Cortland County.

The process identifies “tracks,” or focus areas for cooperative work in the community, which currently are: children and youth, economic development, health, housing, and sustainability. The Coalition participates in, and contributes significantly to, the “Cortland Counts” process, providing data and leading the agenda for the Youth Track. Literacy goals have been included in the Youth Track of the Cortland Counts process since 2015. The most recent 2013 report, along with prior reports, can be seen at www.sevenvalleyshealth.org.

Cortland County has a strong base of literacy programming through the Family Reading Partnership, our local libraries, BOCES, CAPCO, YWCA, Child Development Council and other entities. As members of the coalition these entities have worked to align strategies and programs. We are also coordinating with other initiatives that align with the goals of the Campaigns such as Cavity Free Cortland and the Cortland County Hunger Coalition., and programs such as Head Start, Family Matters, Strengthening Families, and our various mentoring programs. CACTC has positioned itself as the hub of content distribution and awareness building. We create and distribute content to build awareness around important issues in the hopes of positively influencing parents in the community. We have seen positive examples of this with National Mentoring Month, National Nutrition Month, and hope to do a similar campaign for Attendance Awareness Month.

**Data (Assurance #5)**

The Literacy Coordinator with the support of the various Literacy Coalition Workgroup members has worked to build relationships with key stakeholders who have access to the data needed to set baselines and track progress. The Literacy Coalition has begun to coordinate activities with the various schools and other non-profit agencies.

In 2015 we established Workgroups around the issues of School Attendance, School Readiness, Summer Learning and Adult Learning. In fall 2015 a Measurement Workgroup was established to be the hub for data collection and analysis, due to the fact that this requires more specialized knowledge and that many workgroup members were more interested in programming. The CACTC Literacy Coordinator and Coalition Director will both oversee and support the workgroups which all have a chair.

We have established contacts in all of the schools to collect school attendance and summer learning loss data. The schools possess the bulk of the data that is required. The School Readiness Action Team is supporting the Imagination Library and has set up a partnership between the Cortland Free Library, Cortland City Schools and Le Moyne College to measure if the program has an impact on the participating children’s school readiness when they enter Kindergarten. We also have involvement from OCM BOCES. Preschool and Head Start providers have been supportive and involved in helping to develop a systematic way to measure school readiness which has proven to be more complicated than expected.

The collection of attendance data has been our success story. We were able to get all of the school districts on board to report chronic absences and the overall attendance rate quarterly in the few weeks following the end of each marking period.

Although the DeRuyter School is not in Cortland County some of its district is in our county and so they have been active in the project. The various schools all use different methods and programs which make having county-wide data somewhat more challenging to ‘collect’ and compare. Each school district has somewhat different policies and practices.

**Success and Sustainability (Assurance #6)**

A major benefit of the literacy initiative being developed within CACTC is that a coalition structure is in already place. CACTC has had two full-time staff to help coordinate and promote the Literacy Coalition. However, they have been coordinating this coalition initiative with no funding until Spring 2016 and have only had a small fraction of their time to dedicate to this project due to other program commitments. With the support of the CNY Community Foundation, a part-time Literacy Coordinator will begin taking over some of the work of coordinating the initiative in Spring 2016.

Through the Cortland Counts Community Assessment's yearly report on the health and well-being of Cortland County, CACTC has access to much of the data required for a community-needs assessment. The literacy initiative has been integrated into the existing Coalition structure of CACTC with the establishment of workgroups, board oversight, budgets and so on.

One Coalition partner already involved directly in literacy is the Family Reading Partnership (FRP), which works to promote family reading and ensure that all families in the community have access to quality children’s books in their homes. The Books To Grow On is one of their largest programs and CACTC serves as that program’s fiscal sponsor, ensuring that 100% of the funds they raises go to providing books for children. Other coalition partners that work on literacy include our school districts, the YWCA, CAPCO, SUNY Cortland, OCM BOCES, the Cortland Free Library, the Child Development Council and others. The Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library through the partnership with the Cortland Free Library already secured enough funding for Year 1 of the program.

The Adult Learning Workgroup has grown to be a strong, autonomous group working to implement its strategies. The group with the support of CAPCO is currently pursuing funding for its various initiatives and has already established a program named “Cortland County Literacy Volunteers” with the support of BOCES.

Our partnership with the Central New York Community Foundation has proven to be a huge asset. CACTC is working to develop a comprehensive fundraising strategy, which includes the literacy initiative. The CACTC Coalition Director in collaboration with the Literacy Coordinator and partner entities will spend time securing funding for these projects. Coalition partners will work together on developing cooperative agreements to secure funding.

**Part Three: Overview of the CSAP Development Process**

Starting in 2014, CACTC started the process of developing a literacy initiative for Cortland County. Improving literacy in all forms fits very well with not only the mission of CACTC, but also many of the entities that are partners in the Coalition. As part of its commitment to working on literacy in Cortland County, CACTC formed a literacy taskforce to work on developing a literacy initiative for the County. The taskforce brought together existing coalition partners and others in the community interested in working on the project.

The main task of the literacy taskforce was to decide in which area(s) to focus the coalition’s literacy initiative. As part of this process, the taskforce invited Kim Scott from Literacy Powerline to one of our meetings to discuss some of the possibilities. Kim Scott suggested the Campaign for Grade Level Learning as an excellent starting point for the literacy taskforce that will build upon the existing literacy programs of coalition partners (Family Reading Partnership, CAPCO head start, etc.). After reviewing the Campaign for Grade Level Reading, the taskforce agreed this was the best way to proceed, and asked Kim Scott and Literacy Powerline to help us develop our community action plan for the Campaign for Grade Level Reading.

To develop the Community Solutions Action Plan (CSAP), CACTC planned and facilitated three community literacy forums that were attended by over 100 partners, individuals and leaders in the community to discuss the issue of literacy in Cortland County. During these three forums participants brainstormed existing barriers/problems, existing programs, and strategies to address existing problems for summer learning, schools readiness, attendance, adult learning and parent engagement.

Following the community forums, five new workgroups were established (summer learning, school readiness, attendance, adult learning, and measurement) to develop the information from community the community forums into strategies for the CSAP. In addition to the community literacy forums, focus groups, surveys, and key leader information was collected by the individual workgroups to develop the CSAP strategies.

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