

LOCAL NEWS

A Little Saturday Music

Young musicians don't let budget woes drown their notes

By Julia Terruso
Contributing writer

Syracuse's 26th annual All-City Instrumental Music Festival started on a somber note Saturday, as Supt. Dan Lowengard talked budget cuts and appealed to parents in the audience to ask legislators to redistribute funds.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo's budget proposal reduces the overall Syracuse City School District budget by 7 percent. The \$332 million budget is a four-year low, Lowengard said. Cuts will mean the elimination of 540 positions or 15 percent of staff, he said. That means 15 out of the 100 art and music teachers in the district will be cut.

"I've never cut the arts before, but this year's cuts are so deep," Lowengard said. "Will it mean no All-City next year? We don't know yet, probably not. But it might mean class sizes getting bigger, fewer lessons, delays in buying instruments. And that's awful for the kids."

After Lowengard spoke, the 372 students from schools throughout the district quickly brought the tempo back up, delighting video-camera holding, waving parents and friends in the Henninger High School auditorium. The All-City festival brings together the most talented student musicians from orchestras and bands across the district.

Mary Zook celebrated her 11th birthday on stage with her violin. Mary, who's been playing for two years, was recommended for the All-City orchestra ensemble by her teacher William Sokolowski at Huntington Elementary.



Nicholas Lisi / Post-Standard

CORCORAN HIGH SCHOOL student Ellie Stultz plays the timpani drums Saturday during the All-City Instrumental Music Festival Saturday at Henninger High School. She is a member of the Junior High School band, whose conductor is Cherry Thun.

"I think when she heard it was on her birthday she might have been a little disappointed," said Mary's mother, Kim. "But it was an honor for her, and I was really proud of her to be selected just two years into it."

An audience favorite was "Junkyard Jam" performed by the All-City Junior High Band and composed by Kevin Mixon, district Field Coordinator for Fine Arts. Mixon dedicated the song, which had students drumming on trash cans and buckets, to Lowengard, who is retiring after this year. Lowengard dabbled in percussion dur-

ing one of Mixon's classes this year, prompting the tribute selection.

Deshawn Manuel, 14, was part of the percussion team on "Junkyard Jam." Manuel has been playing the drums since the third grade and says he's partial to rock, jazz and off-tempo. He practices on his drum set at home about six hours a week.

"Every day I have band I really want to come to school," he said. "Before I thought I was the only one who knew how to play an instrument, but now I go to class with like 60 kids who are all really good."