

# State speeds up cancer probe

■ Health department puts resources into investigation of rates at Southside High.

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The New York State Health Department has made investigating cancer rates among students at Southside High School a "high priority."  
"We began gathering information this week," said department spokeswoman Kristine Smith. "It's obviously a pressing issue since there are children involved."  
State health experts usually investigate cases in the order they are reported, but investigators were pulled from other

cases to look into Southside's cancer rates, Smith said.  
Smith said several issues make it a priority: cancer in young people, the number of cancer cases initially reported, and the fact that the cases are linked to a single location rather than a neighborhood or several parts of a town.  
Local and state health officials were contacted last week after parents of Southside students and city councilmen James Hare and Dan Royle sent a letter to the Elmira school district requesting an investigation. Parents of Tom Patros and Mike Tobin, stu-

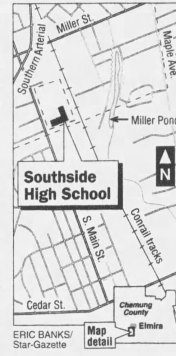
dents who have cancer, were among those who signed the letter.  
The letter claims 13 students or former students have contracted cancer since 1997, and at least six teens (including Patros and Tobin) currently attending the school of 1,100 students have cancer.  
The school, at 777 S. Main St., opened in September 1979 on a former industrial site. Several petroleum tanks are buried beneath the school, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has said the tanks are the cause of petroleum pollution in nearby soil and in Miller Pond.  
Next door to the school is the former American LaFrance factory site where

## Meeting planned

A meeting will be held at 7 p.m. May 2 in the Southside High School auditorium for the school board, parents, city council members, the Department of Environmental Conservation and health officials to discuss the cancer rate.

fire engines were made until 1985. The Department of Environmental Conservation has overseen the cleanup of hazardous wastes at the LaFrance site since then.  
Last week, the school district requested the Chemung County Health Department begin an investigation.  
Since then, the health department has been receiving telephone calls from people who would like to be inter-

viewed as part of the investigation, said Robert Page, director of public health. Many callers want to share information about cancer cases among friends or relatives.  
In-depth interviews will begin next week, Page said.  
After the county health department contacted its state counterpart, state cancer surveillance and epidemiology staff began working on the



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