

## Editorial

### Search for SHS students

■ Advisory group makes another wise move in a worldwide effort to track school grads.

Creating the Southside Advisory Committee to monitor the cancer investigation at Southside High School has turned out to be a smart move by the Elmira school district.

The committee has pursued an ambitious agenda that:

■ Keeps advancing this investigation through special projects and monthly public meetings.

■ Forces committee members and state health and environmental officials to communicate regularly about the community's quest to learn reasons for the cancer cases among current and former Southside students.

What's been especially impressive is that the emotions that ran so high at larger public gatherings in May and August have not been the rule during advisory committee gatherings. Instead, members of the group — including parents of students with cancer — have persistently looked for ways to determine whether there is a connection between Southside's environment and the 53 reported cancer cases involving the high school's students and alumni.

Up to this point, repeated tests of the school's air and soil have indicated no environmental dangers to students, even though the school was built on a former industrial site once contaminated by various materials.

The advisory board has kept plugging away at this health mystery at the high school, which some 7,500 students have attended since the school opened in 1979. The board's tenaciousness is impressive.

One action plan, in particular, could produce a more accurate count of former students who have cancer. The board and the district have been talking to a company that publishes alumni directories and, therefore, is experienced at tracking down high school graduates who have scattered around the world after leaving their hometown.

Once reached, Southside alumni would receive a letter telling them about the cancer study by the New York State Health Department and would be asked to provide personal medical information directly to the Health Department. Officials hope that will help them glean a more accurate count in their study, because up to now, they can only confirm cancer cases of current residents living in this area.

In August, the state's cancer cluster investigation — a study showing the frequency of reported cancer cases in one area — determined that the Southside cases reported at the time did not exceed statistical averages. However, officials acknowledged that their figures could not include former students who had moved away from the area.

By using the alumni-directory company, the advisory board and district are making a good-faith effort to thoroughly represent past students who may have moved away and have cancer.

There are no guaranteed results, but the attempt to be more inclusive reflects a determination by the advisory board and district to explore every possible angle to the concerns about cancer at the high school.

It's rational, smart and community-minded.

#### Meeting Tuesday

■ Information session: State officials will attend an informal question-and-answer session to address queries about cancer cases among Southside High School students and graduates, and concerns regarding environmental contamination at the former American LaFrance site on South Main Street.

■ Where: Tuesday, 3:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

■ Where: Southport Fire Department, 1001 Carl St., Southport.

Clipped By:



apatros

Tue, Apr 16, 2019