

# Challenges await Elmira schools chief

■ Superintendent will start her job during trying time for district.

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Star-Gazette  
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**SHERWOOD**

Laura Sherwood begins her new job as Elmira schools superintendent next week in a time of turbulence.

Police have just finished investigating a hazing incident among Elmira Free Academy students. Southside High School faces a New York State Health Department investigation of cancer cases among students. The district must replace both its high school principals. The Elmira Teachers Association recently rejected a proposed contract with the district.

Elmira teachers, parents and community members differ in their opinions about which issues Sherwood should make first priority, but they all hope she will offer strong leadership to a district that has weathered a year of transition.

Sherwood has dealt with some of these challenges during her previous job as superintendent of the Cleveland Hill Union Free School District in Cheektowaga, N.Y.

The Corning native was hired in March to replace Interim Superintendent Joseph Farinola, who led the district for more than a year as the school board conducted multi-

ple searches for a full-time replacement. The previous superintendent, Timothy O'Neill, left the district in April 1999. Some want Sherwood to immediately address the issues in the spotlight.

School board member Susan Skidmore wants Sherwood to help the board develop a district policy on hazing. The board is scheduled to discuss the issue at its Wednesday meeting, the first Sherwood will attend. The meeting is at 5 p.m. in the district board room, 951 Hoffman St.

At least three EFA freshmen were injured earlier this month when they were taken from school to a garage and paddled by seniors who have since graduated. Parents of the victims have decided not to file charges, but the former seniors who were involved will be tried in youth court July 7.

"We need strong language in the code of conduct and harassment policies that everyone can understand," Skidmore said. "Even though the hazing happened off school property, it is very upsetting. It's disgusting that this has been allowed to perpetuate."

At Southside, the possibility of a link between student cancer cases and industrial contamination around the school is a prominent concern. Parent Julie Patros, whose son is one

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Sun, Apr 14, 2019