

# Cancer: Meeting with students

Continued from Page 1A

lic meeting Tuesday night, the Elmira school district intends to gather state and local officials who will meet with students and answer any questions they might have, said district spokesman Mike Kapusta.

The district expects the meeting will take place late this week or early next week, Kapusta said.

At the public meeting Tuesday night, state health officials said a preliminary investigation of seemingly high cancer rates at the school at 77 S. Main St. showed the facility is not a health hazard to students and faculty members. Thirteen current and former students have developed cancer since 1997.

The school, which opened in fall 1979, was built on former industrial property. The soil under the school is contaminated with fuel oil, and is being cleaned up. More soil tests will start Monday and results of those tests will be available in three or four weeks.

Marisa Button, 18, the student council president, said the council has not addressed the cancer cases.

"I think most students would feel better if they had more information," Button said. "There's a lot of gossip. Having a meeting would probably help. I don't think it would stop people from talking about it."

Students say they were talking about the cancer cases at the school long before the parents of three of the 13 people with cancer and two Elmira City Council members wrote a letter to the school board in early April seeking answers.

"We talk about it all the time," said Kate Stanton, 15, a sophomore. "We have concerns. It would be good to hear what they have to say about the soil tests and air tests."

Of the handful of students who

attended the meeting Tuesday, most were upset that the school was being blamed for the cancer cases, said Principal Arline Ely.

Ely said she worries that a meeting for students might stir up more anxiety and not ease their fears.

"If we do a meeting with kids, it should be a question-and-answer period," Ely said. "We should let (students') concerns drive the need to meet. Chemical names and statistics are scary. We need less presenting and more answering."

City Council member James Hare, D-6th, one of the two council members who signed the April letter and also a history teacher at the high school, said an assembly would be a good way for students to talk through their concerns and have their questions answered.

A few students said holding a meeting is unnecessary.

"I think it's getting blown out of proportion," said Matt Ketron, 16, a junior. "I think people just need something to talk about."

Lisa Lagonegro, a freshman whose mother, Janice Lagonegro, suggested Tuesday night that the high school be closed until the soil test results can prove there is no health risk for students, said she doesn't really worry about getting sick from the school, but she would like to hear what the officials would say.

Janice Lagonegro said she would pull her daughter and son, Kyle, from the school if environmental engineers found any contaminants in the soil, Lisa Lagonegro said.

"These parents have reason to worry," said Julie Patros, whose son, Tom, was found to have cancer in 1997. "There definitely appears to be reason for some concern. I would not send another child there unless they had all the proof in."

Attendance at Southside has not dropped, nor have any students attempted to transfer to another school, Kapusta said.



Clipped By:



apatros

Fri, Mar 29, 2019