

Meeting draws few teens

■ Turnout low because it was second meeting and also held after school, Hare says.

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Only four Southside High School students showed up for a public meeting Thursday afternoon at the school to address student concerns about cancer rates at the school.

There were, however, 21 adults at the 3 p.m. meeting. They were members of the media, school officials and representatives from local and state health and environmental agencies.

"I guess most of the other students had other things to do," said 16-year-old Jennifer Schuck, one of the four girls who sat together in a semicircle and quizzed officials.

Two of the girls said many students are apathetic about the issue, don't think the school is the cause of the cancer or were simply afraid to talk publicly in a room full of adults.

James E. Hare, a social studies teacher at Southside and a city councilman, said that many of the students and faculty attended the public meeting on May 2 and may have already had their questions answered. Hare believed the time of Thursday's meeting may have contributed to the low turnout among students, he said.

"There were a lot of students and faculty at (the May 2) meeting," Hare said. "That would be a better gauge of the student interest, compared to an after-school meeting when kids have sports and just finished a full day of school."

At least 24 students at the school have developed cancer since the school opened in 1979, according to the Chemu-



MILES NORMAN/Star-Gazette

Katie Fuller, right, asks questions regarding cancer at her school as fellow freshman Sarah Wilcox looks on during a Thursday afternoon meeting that addressed students' concerns.

CONCERN on the SOUTHSIDE



BROCKENBERRY SCHUCK

ng County Health Department and Star-Gazette research. At least five of the 1,100 students currently at the school have cancer.

Several parents and two city councilmen raised health questions on April 8 when they sent a letter about the cancer cases to Deborah Pierce, school board president, asking for help and answers.

The school, at 777 S. Main St., is built on a former industrial site that is contaminated with fuel oil. State health offi-

cialists say the oil, which is 15 feet underground, is not a health threat because of its depth.

This week the state began taking soil samples to determine if the property is contaminated with heavy metals and other hazardous chemicals found and removed from the adjacent property that belonged to the former Remington Rand and American

LaFrance factories. Those test results and an updated list of students who have cancer and the types of cancers they have are expected to be released during a meeting tentatively scheduled for August, said Robert Page, director of the Chemung County Health Department, who attended Thursday's meeting.

In the meantime, the health department will sample the air at the school and at Elmira Free Academy, on Hoffman Street on the Northside, so officials have a school of similar size for comparison.

Thursday's meeting was a sharp contrast to last week's meeting attended by more

than 400 parents, teachers and students.

But health officials Thursday had the same message: The school is safe and not a health threat.

"That doesn't mean we might not find something down the road, but if you were to ask me today if the school is safe, my answer would be yes," Page said.

That did little to comfort 14-year-old Katie Fuller, who attended Thursday's meeting. Fuller stopped drinking the water at the school last month after news spread about the cancer and possible pollutants.

"I think they (health and school officials) could be hid-

See MEETING/2C

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