

Southside

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tonight on the agency's investigation and its in-depth study of the students with testicular cancer. The Southside Advisory Committee meeting is open to the public and will begin at 6 p.m. today at Southside High School, 777 S. Main St.

The state began investigating possible environmental hazards in April after parents raised concerns about a seemingly elevated rate of cancer among current and former Southside students.

At a public meeting in August, officials of the state Cancer Surveillance Program said they had confirmed 22 cases of cancer among current and former students since the school opened at its present site in 1979. That number is lower than what would be expected statistically, the health department reported.

However, the number of students found to have testicular cancer since 1997 is higher than what can be considered a statistical variance, the health department stated. State health officials are reviewing each of those patients' medical records since birth to determine whether there are any similarities among them, said Claire Pospisil, a health department spokeswoman.

In August, some community members questioned the results of the state's cancer investigation and urged the school district to help solicit information from Southside graduates who have moved out of the area.

So far, the school district has collected mailing lists for the classes of 1980, 1990 to 1994 and 2000 to 2004, which could potentially reach 3,300 out of roughly 7,500 students who have attended the school, according to Kristin Butler, spokeswoman for the school district.

These mailing lists contain the last known addresses of students. Some could be 20 years old, and others have been updated recently through reunion lists, said Elmira school Superintendent Laura Sherwood.

The district has one person, Sherry Collins, who is a secretary at Southside, working extra duties to compile the class lists, Sherwood said.

Harris Publishing has the staff to make follow-up calls, track down the hard-to-reach students and perform these tasks at no cost to the district, Sherwood said.

"They make their living contacting alumni," Sherwood said. "They're professionals."

The company covers its expenses by selling the directories to alumni, Sherwood said.

Harris Publishing told the district that it would normally take one year to create an alumni directory for a

Upcoming meetings

■ **6 p.m. today:** State officials will present information about the Southside cancer cluster investigation at a meeting at the high school, 777 S. Main St.

■ **3:30 to 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 5:** State officials will be available to answer community members' concerns regarding environmental contamination at the former American LaFrance site on South Main Street. The informal question-and-answer session will be held at the Southport Fire Department, 1001 Carl St.

More information

For more information about the environmental investigation and cleanup, residents can review work plans and other documents at the Southside Branch Library, 378 S. Main St., Elmira, or can call the conservation department's regional office at 800/342-9296.

For information about health concerns, call the state Department of Health at 800/458-1158, ext. 6309 or ext. 6402.

20-year-old school and that it typically only contacts graduates.

The company said it could speed up the process to four to six months and could expand its efforts to include contacting all students, who may have attended the school but did not graduate. These accommodations could be made at the district's expense, Sherwood said.

She did not have a cost estimate yet from the company.

Dr. Patricia Meinhardt, who serves on the advisory committee and chairs the Arnot Ogden Medical Center Health Risk Sub-Committee, said the publishing company could help increase the total number of students involved in the cancer cluster investigation. The only drawback could be the amount of time such an effort would take, Meinhardt said.

"We want to do the very best job that we can in finding alumni and determining the number of cancer cases," Meinhardt said. "We also want to get that information as quickly as we can."

The district has not begun mailing the surveys, Sherwood said. The district is working with the advisory committee to come up with a plan for how best to proceed.

School officials said they need to decide whether to reopen the school's athletic fields for spring sports by mid-February, when scheduling begins.

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Tue, Apr 16, 2019