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The latest: Here's what we know about Hempfield High drag show fallout

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Community members rally before the Hempfield School District board meeting on Tuesday, May 10, 2022. Photo by Connor Hollinger | LNP Correspondent

Residents of Hempfield School District had their first opportunity Tuesday to speak to the school board since a controversy erupted over an April 25 after-school event during which professional drag queens performed at Hempfield High School.



Upset about the Gay Sexuality Alliance Club event arose on social media days after it took place.

The school district's administration issued a statement April 29 indicating that it had launched an investigation and that one person had been put on administrative leave pending the outcome of the investigation.

Here's what we know and don't know about the fallout.

What new came up at the school board meeting?

Two new developments came to light during the meeting, which was attended by a total of more than 400 in person and online.

1 — School board President Grant Keener said that two more individuals have now been placed on administrative leave pending the outcome of an investigation being led by Superintendent Mike Bromirski and Karen Hall, executive director of human resources and business operations. That means a total of three people are on administrative leave. Keener declined to identify the individuals.

“We understand that in the absence of being able to provide additional information during an accurate investigation, sometimes people rush to judgment or draw their own conclusions without facts, speculate and/or share misinformation,” Bromirski said during the school board meeting. “We will not respond to these claims as it could hamper the investigation.”

2 — There was confirmation during the meeting that similar events have been held at the high school in the past. Student and Gay Sexuality Alliance Club Vice President Miguel Angel Rosado spoke during the school board meeting. Rosado attended the event and said it has been held for three years without complaint. Rosado said the event was educational and hopes the drag shows will continue at the school in the future.

What happened at Hempfield High School to spark this controversy?

A performance by drag queens took place after school at Hempfield High School on April 25. The performance occurred at an event for Gay Sexuality Alliance Club students.

Drag queens associated with entertainment company Depiro's Divas were at the performance, according to company owner Michael Depiro. Although a report published April 29 by Harrisburg 100 included a link to the Depiro's Divas website when it mentioned the event "featured professional dancers," Depiro said his company wasn't involved in the event, the dancers participated on their own and they had agreed to appear for free.

Performers contacted by LNP | LancasterOnline did not immediately respond to request for comment.

What's next?

In the district's statement, it said it will complete a "thorough investigation" and hold those involved accountable with disciplinary action equivalent to the findings of the investigation.

How long that will take and what, if anything, the district will report back to the community is not clear.

What permissions were sought, if any, to host this event and have students in attendance?

The district has not confirmed if permission was sought by the club to host the event and have students in attendance.

A student who attended the event and a parent of a student who attended the event have told LNP | LancasterOnline that filled out parental permission slips were not required to attend.

At least two district policies might apply to organizing the event.

Policy 907 indicates those wishing to visit a school should make arrangements with the school principal no less than 48 hours in advance. Visitors are required to state, in writing, the nature and purpose of their visit.

The policy also states that only entrances "monitored and capable of controlling visitor entry" should be used by visitors while all other entrances should be locked. Visitors must register at the office when they arrive.

It is unclear if this policy applies to after-school events.

Under Policy 122, “extracurricular activities shall not be organized or instituted without the approval of the administration.”

What is the purpose of the club that hosted the event?

The Gay Sexuality Alliance club “brings together LGBTQIA+ and straight students to support each other, provide a safe place to socialize, and work together to improve school climate for all students, regardless of sexual orientation, gender or identity expression,” according to a description of the club on the district’s website.

Kelly Tyson, a French teacher at Centerville Middle School and Hempfield High School, and Carla Vicidomini, an English teacher at Hempfield High School, are advisors for the club, according to the district website.

There’s a video circulating on social media that supposedly shows the event. Has that video been verified?

District officials have not verified that any posts circulating on social media are connected to the event.

However, the district’s statement does note that it “was notified of a concerning social media post and photo, and later videos, of a performance that occurred during an after-school event.”