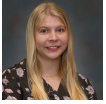


https://lanasteronline.com/news/local/hempfield-high-school-student-sheds-light-on-april-25-drag-show-event/article_d8ca0204-d263-11ec-9bbc-0394161264c1.html

Hempfield High School student sheds light on April 25 drag show event



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Community members rally before the Hempfield School District board meeting on Tuesday, May 10, 2022.

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What happened, exactly, at the afterschool drag show event at Hempfield High School that has raised questions and spurred controversy?

Several weeks later, that answer is still not clear.

However, through one eyewitness account and photographs and videos reviewed by LNP | LancasterOnline, some details have surfaced.

A student member of Hempfield High School's Gay Sexuality Alliance club has stepped forward to defend the April 25 after-school drag show that sparked an uproar and led to an ongoing investigation.

Hempfield junior and GSA Vice President Miguel Angel Rosado spoke to the school board during the public comment portion of Tuesday's board meeting, which drew hundreds of people online and in person.

"Please listen to what I have to say, as I was physically present at this event," Rosado said during the public comment portion of the meeting. "First and foremost, I feel as if a lot of retaliation has come from a lack of education and context."

At first glance, Rosado said, the event seems like something the school shouldn't allow, but Rosado contends that drag shows hold value, particularly for members of the LGBTQ+ community. Drag shows are an integral part of the LGBTQ+ community and its history, Rosado said.

He regrets that the event, through the lens of social media, has turned into something different and, in his public comment, said "I wish things hadn't turned out the way they did."

So far, the district has placed three individuals, who it has not named, on administrative leave. At Tuesday's meeting, board President Grant Keener said an investigation is still ongoing and that the district couldn't share any further details at the time.

Superintendent Mike Bromirski urged residents to refrain from speculating about the nature of the event in the absence of information released by the district. However, photos and videos allegedly taken at the show, as well as speculation and commentary, have already circulated on social media platforms like Facebook.

How did the queens dress and perform?

LNP | LancasterOnline viewed a few photos and brief portions of videos confirmed to be of the April 25 performance. The viewing was permitted for a short time, and all of the images showed the same drag queen. A drag queen is a man who dresses in women's clothes, typically for entertainment purposes.

The videos viewed by LNP | LancasterOnline did not show the queen dancing in a manner that simulated sexual activity, as has been the case in some videos alleged to be from the event and posted online.

The queen was wearing a short blue dress that fell to mid-thigh and an orange-colored wig. In a Live Photo, the queen was shown dropping down in a semi-squat from a standing position. Live Photos are a feature of iPhones that record what happens 1.5 seconds before and after taking a picture.

One of the concerns voiced about the drag show is the attire of the performers. In a statement issued by the district on April 29 announcing that it was investigating what happened, it wrote that "Neither the dress of the invited guests nor the performance was appropriate in our school setting."

The dress, Rosado told the school board on Tuesday, wasn't different from that of many other extracurriculars, though.

"Yes, some of the outfits showed a little more skin," Rosado said during the public comment period of the board meeting, noting that the performers were not nude. "But, the performers were all wearing bathing suits, leotards, jumpers, skirts or dresses." The photos and videos viewed by LNP | LancasterOnline matched these descriptions.

"Heteronormative" activities, such as wrestling, cheerleading, swimming, homecoming and prom allow similar outfits, Rosado said. Things that are described as heteronormative are considered to denote a world view that promotes a female to male relationship as the preferred sexual orientation.

And, in some fashion design classes taught in the high school, Rosado claimed, students can design and make the outfits a drag queen performers would normally wear.

Aside from dress, another point of contention has been the nature of the performance, which some parents have described as “sexual.”

“I feel like we’re promoting sexually explicit behavior,” parent William Crawford said during the public comment portion of Tuesday’s board meeting.

Rosado sees it differently.

Drag shows, Rosado said, showcase dancing – a form of art – not stripping or a “sex show.”

“It doesn’t seem fair to condemn this medium of art, deeming it inappropriate and sexualizing when the school allows students to submit actual (depictions of) nudity for art assignments in art classes,” Rosado said to the board.

And those pieces, Rosado said, can sometimes be found in art shows with students below the high school level.

Additionally, Rosado said that a dance or performance like the drag show is not much different from those of school-related extracurricular activities like gymnastics and musicals.

Students in attendance at the event were not brought onto the stage to dance with the performers, either, Rosado told the board.

An event three years running

The dress and dance moves at the April drag performance for the club were no different than they had been in the past three years that the event has been held, Rosado said. In previous years, no complaints or problems had arisen from the performance, either, he told the board.

“I don’t understand how the school said they were appalled at what took place when it’s been hosted for this long with videos and pictures being shared from previous events on the Schoology page, which is monitored by advisors and administrators,” Rosado said during public comment.

Schoology is a learning management system that Hempfield School District uses to create, manage and share assignments and resources in its schools. Students are only able to see posts by groups they belong to like the Gay Sexuality Alliance club or a specific class. Membership in groups is by invitation by an advisor, teacher or employee only.

One of the Gay Sexuality Alliance advisors, French teacher Kelly Tyson, shared a post on Schoology following the April 25 event thanking students for attending. And, a high school student involved with the club shared reminders about the upcoming event with members.

Several parents at Tuesday's school board meeting called for more accountability from the district and questioned how the event could have gone unnoticed or unapproved. In its initial statement, the district said it does not condone "this type of activity" in its schools.

"The school has a reputation to uphold and a moral high ground to set," parent Angela Hess said at Tuesday's meeting. "By allowing this to happen, it sets the tone that this type of thing is OK in school."

In an effort to "debunk some misconceptions about the event," for people who weren't there. Rosado explained at the meeting that the drag queens all wore visitor passes on their clothing.

And, Rosado continued, drag queens volunteered their time and didn't receive payment on the taxpayer's dime.

A form of gender expression

The event wasn't merely for entertainment purposes, according to Rosado.

To the LGBTQ+ community, Rosado said drag performance has historical value.

"Drag is a very big part of the community itself, but also its history," Rosado said in public comment, adding that, though the event was open to all students, it was mainly for students in the Gay Sexuality Alliance club or who belong to the LGBTQ+ community.

Drag dates back to the late 1800s, when anti-cross-dressing laws were used to enforce dress normative to one's gender at the time. And, drag had a start – out of necessity – in Shakespearean theater. Men had to dress as women to play female roles in the late 16th and 17th centuries, when women were barred from performing.

“Drag is a form of gender expression that can be expressed through performances,” Rosado said in public comment. “It is focused on blending, blurring or even erasing the boundaries of gender. And by condemning this event, we’re denying queer students of their own history.”



Hempfield School District places three individuals on administrative leave in drag show investigation