



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on June 1, 2023

New Hampshire School Spends Covid-19 Relief Funds on Pride Event

A New Hampshire school district already embroiled in a lawsuit over its gender-identity policy is spending \$4,000 of federal Covid-19 relief funds on a high-school Pride event that includes a drag show.

Manchester High School West art teacher Richella Simard applied in April for a grant from the city's Community Event and Activation Grant (CEAG) program, which is funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), to pay for the school's June 2 Youth Pride event.

After pointing out that West High has held Youth Pride events since 2018, Simard wrote in an [email](#), "We are looking to get equipment that is sustainable and durable for many more Pride celebrations and activities at West to come!"

Simard requested \$4,000 from CEAG and expected an additional \$2,150 in unspecified matching funds, according to her [grant application](#). She said she intended to spend the money on, among other things, food and drinks, a photo booth, "Pride decorations and swag," Pride T-shirts, and drag performers, the last of which she estimated would cost \$500.

The city's Planning and Community Development Department, part of the executive branch headed by Democratic Mayor Joyce Craig, awarded the grant even though, as [NHJournal](#) observed, "the items do not appear to qualify for ARPA funding under federal guidelines." The department's [ARPA web page](#) explains that ARPA was intended to help state and local governments "respond to economic and public health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic." A January [press release](#) states that CEAG funds "community-based projects that address public health, public safety, the economic recovery of impacted sectors, educational disparities, and more." Moreover, a [2021 survey](#) of city residents found that most wanted ARPA dollars spent on either infrastructure or housing. Ten percent of residents wanted them spent on education, but it's likely that very few of those residents had Pride events in mind.

Craig did not respond to inquiries about the West High grant from NHJournal; but New Hampshire Department of Education Commissioner Frank Edelblut, a Republican, did.

"Is this really the best use of taxpayer funds?" he asked.

He also "stressed the Department of Education has nothing to do with the funding or approval process for the Manchester West Pride Event and drag show," reported NHJournal.

That put the responsibility for the grant back on the school district and the city. Asked about the matter by NHJournal, Manchester School Board member Jim O'Connell passed the buck, saying, "It's the city's



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deal. We didn't measure it or look at the qualifications for it." He did acknowledge that the board had approved spending the grant on the Pride event without any real debate, but said such rubber-stamping was typical of outside grants. Besides, he added, "I don't have any problem with a youth pride event for our LGBTQ students and others."

Neither, apparently, does Manchester School District Superintendent Jennifer Gillis.

"As a district, we support and care for all of our students as they learn and grow.... Events such as this are consistent with the goals of our community-developed strategic plan, and in line with district policies," she said in a statement. "As with other years, this is an after-school, extra-curricular, opt-in event."

Not everyone is happy about this use of taxpayer money. One Manchester West parent expressed his outrage in a letter to public officials including Governor Chris Sununu and Edelblut.

"Rather than focusing on essential aspects such as graduation rates, reading scores, and effectively tackling issues like bullying, the district seems to be allocating resources and attention toward irrelevant events like drag shows. This misplaced emphasis is a clear indication that the district is failing in its fundamental duties towards our students," the parent wrote. "Taxpayer dollars should not be sponsoring drag shows."

The district is also failing another of its fundamental duties: keeping parents informed of what their children are doing at school. The mother of a Manchester public-school student is [suing](#) the district after she was told that school staffers and teachers would continue using her child's new name and pronouns despite her express wishes that they not do so. A county judge ruled in the school's favor, writing, "The right to make decisions about the care, custody, and control of one's child is not absolute." The mother appealed to the state Supreme Court, which heard arguments in the case in late April.





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