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A Good Fit

Finding the right school for children in
LGBTQ families

BY AARON SPENCER

As Nina's little boy grew older, she started to debate where he should attend school.

But in addition to the questions most parents ask when considering their children's educations, Nina had another concern. Namely, she wanted to be sure her child wouldn't be treated differently for having two moms.

"We wanted to find the right school where no one was going to make fun of him," Nina says.

Nina, who requested that only her first name be used to protect the identity of her child, is one of many LGBTQ parents in the Portland area who have searched for a welcoming school. Each family is different—either the parents or the children identify as

sexuality than ever before. For the first time, a majority of those polled by Gallup in 2010 said gay and lesbian relationships were "morally acceptable."

"Students coming out used to be something you'd see in high school, but now you see students identifying as LGBT much younger," says Jollee Patterson, head attorney for Portland Public Schools, who deals with sexual orientation and gender identity issues.

Nina eventually settled on a school in the Portland Public School District after visiting several schools and speaking with teachers and principals.

"Every single principal was very supportive," Nina says. "I asked them how they would deal with different situations, and I was very happy with Portland-area schools. They are very progressive."

Not every LGBTQ parent places such a high priority on welcoming schools, however. The level of priority depends in part on each family's situation.

Stephen Dunlevy, for example, says he and his male partner chose Glencoe Elementary for their two children based partly on school report cards they reviewed when looking for houses.

"I don't think we really scouted out individual schools for a degree of LGBT support," Dunlevy says.

Their decision-making process could have been different if they had thought their children may identify as LGBTQ, Dunlevy says. Their children don't give any indication that they

What to look for in an LGBTQ-supportive school

- Administrators and faculty who talk fairly about LGBTQ issues
- Anti-bullying policy that complies with the Oregon Safe Schools Act
- Names sexual orientation or gender identity
- Accessible to the students, either posted or online
- Effective measures are in place for reporting violations
- LGBTQ support group, if the child is old enough to need it
- Supportive parents in the parent-teacher association

Information from Zena Britadesco, program manager for community education at TransActive

some sort of sexual minority—but the factors they want in a supportive school are similar.

Parents ask a number of questions: Does the school have an effective policy against bullying? Can families openly talk about LGBTQ issues with teachers and administrators? How do parents of other children react to LGBTQ families?

The extra level of choosiness follows a trend of teenagers coming out of the closet at a younger age, according to school administrators and the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, or GLSEN. Also, more Americans approve of homo-

identify as anything other than heterosexual, and they don't show signs that they need LGBTQ support.

But Nina's son, though he's still in grade school and has not yet identified as LGBTQ either, does have a penchant for something most boys his age do not—he likes to wear dresses.

"He's just a boy who loves dresses," Nina says. "He's a gender warrior—what can I say?"

The dress issue was challenging in the beginning. Other kids talked negatively about him. But Nina talked to teachers at the school about the problem; she even



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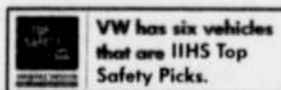
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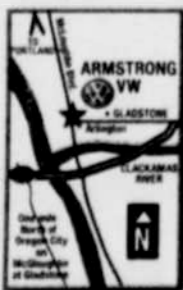
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