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September-October 2021 | Issue #138

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**Gay Parent**  
LGBTQ MAGAZINE

September-October 2021 issue #138

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### 23rd Annual Gay Parent Magazine LGBTQ Friendly

**Independent School Directory** - Over 150 schools, ranging from nursery to college listed by state. Includes schools for students with learning differences, bilingual schools, all girls or all boys, boarding and religious schools. Contact these schools to find out what safety measures they are implementing. - page 12



**ADVERTISER SPOTLIGHT: Stratford School.** Stratford School in California is unveiling their plan for the "new" normal with safety and flexibility in mind. - page 25



### ADVERTISER SPOTLIGHT: The École.

The École in New York City has grown and now welcomes two year olds to their bilingual program. - page 31

**2 Bumps Same Love** - New Zealand couple Taryn Cumming and Kat Buchanan give birth to their children, Piper and Ryan, just four days apart. - page 34



### Beauty Expert Ryan Nickulas Survives Covid and Regroups

We last featured Ryan Nickulas and his family in 2018. In addition to a brush with Covid, a lot has changed for Ryan. - page 41

**2dads1daniel** - Ted Simonin and Carlos Serrano met in a bar when Ted asked Carlos for help in deflecting an aggressive intoxicated stranger. Since then, they've adopted a son and Ted has been illustrating their lives in a comic strip. - page 50



**Politics Clog the Hallway of Learning** - Texas professor Aubree Calvin discusses going back to school for the LGBTQ community amid current politics. - page 57

**Hollywood Couple Post-Adopt** - Actor Griffin Matthews and composer Matt Gould build their family via RaiseAChild. - page 66



**Asia's First Gay Parenting TV Series** - We first featured Jay Lin and his family in 2017. Since then, Jay has produced Daddy and Papa, Asia's first TV series about gay parents with roles played by his children. - page 77

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*Cover photo courtesy of Jay Lin. Photos this page, top to bottom, photo courtesy of Debby Taché, Rebecca Smith, Aubree Calvin, Ted Simonin, and Matt Gould.*

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# Back to School: Politics Clog the Hallways of Learning

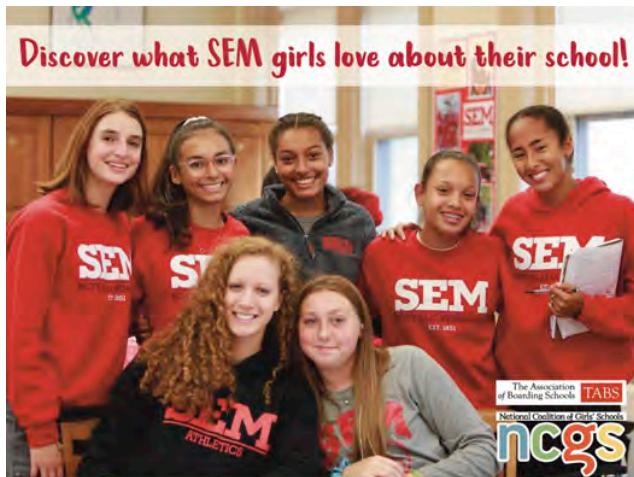
By Aubree Calvin

Were you someone that looked forward to the start of a new school year? Seeing your friends, finding your classroom and locker, hoping you get that one popular teacher and avoiding the insanely hard teacher your older siblings warned you about. Maybe when you were younger, you liked getting new school supplies, organizing your desk, and covering your books. I honestly don't remember liking or hating the start of school. It's mostly a complete blur, but I do remember a few things. In the 5th grade, I remember promising myself and my parents that this was going to be the year that I kept my desk clean, and that assignments, notes from teachers, and broken crayons wouldn't end up crumpled in the back of it. I did not keep that promise. In the 8th grade, I remember the nervousness of being in a new state and for the first time in my life attending classes with kids that mostly didn't have military parents like me. Later, as a freshman a year younger than most of my class, navigating hallways full of students literally old enough to work, drive, and vote, was terrifying, and to this day, I am thankful for the few music and arts friends I had to eat lunch with for four years. Do you know what I didn't worry about? Whether the state legislature was going to make my mere existence illegal, actively try to impair my school experience, or that school policies wouldn't limit my gender expression.

Not that those policies didn't exist. Just that my teenage self, much like others of my generation, was not ready or self-aware enough to come out while in school. Unlike Baby Boomers and Gen Xers who were more likely to come out sometime between our twenties and our forties, studies show that younger Millennials and Generation Z are more likely to come out *continued on page 59*



The author, Aubree Calvin (left) with wife Victoria (middle), and daughter Corinne on vacation in South Carolina.



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at younger ages, and a greater percentage of their cohort are more likely to identify as LGBTQ. A recent Gallup survey showed that 1 in 6 members of Generation Z (loosely identified as anyone born after 1996), identify as something other than heterosexual or cisgender. Not only are children coming out at younger ages today, but they're also more comfortable having LGBTQ friends, teachers, and parents, and they're more knowledgeable about the spectrum of sexual orientations and gender identities than ever before. This should be celebrated. One of the great marks of our advancing civilization is that every generation seems to be more accepting of others than their predecessors, and this is not a new occurrence. The latter part of the 20th century was spent breaking down social walls based on race, gender, and gendered norms, and we were more willing to have friends that did not look like us. The 21st century is doing the same thing, but for gender identity and sexual orientation. Things are not perfect by any stretch of the imagination on any of those fronts, but things are getting better.

We're more willing to challenge accepted norms and hopefully have the hard conversations that lead to better understanding and openness.

That is not to say that coming out when you are school aged is easy. Even though more and more kids are coming out as non-heterosexual or non-cisgender in school at school-age, we know students still face enormous challenges. The 2019 GLSEN Student Climate Survey showed that 86% of LGBTQ students experienced harassment, 59% felt unsafe at school, and 45% avoided gender segregated spaces like locker rooms and bathrooms. Students report instances of discriminatory policies such as receiving harsher punishments for same sex displays of affection than students in opposite sex relationships, having to fight to have their chosen names and/or pronouns respected, being prohibited from bringing a same sex date to social events like prom, and being prohibited from discussing or writing about LGBTQ topics in school assignments. Just in my Dallas-Fort Worth region of Texas, most schools still have unnecessarily gendered dress codes which do not allow stu-

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dents to express any type of gender non-conformity or enforce stereotyped norms of masculinity and femininity. And this is to say nothing of the experiences of being an open LGBTQ teacher or administrator, a topic of such complexity that I'm afraid we must leave it for another article. For all the courage it takes for young people to come out, we as adults need to make sure we are stepping up to protect them. And judging by the political happenings in

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2021, I'd say it is a mixed bag of how well we are doing.

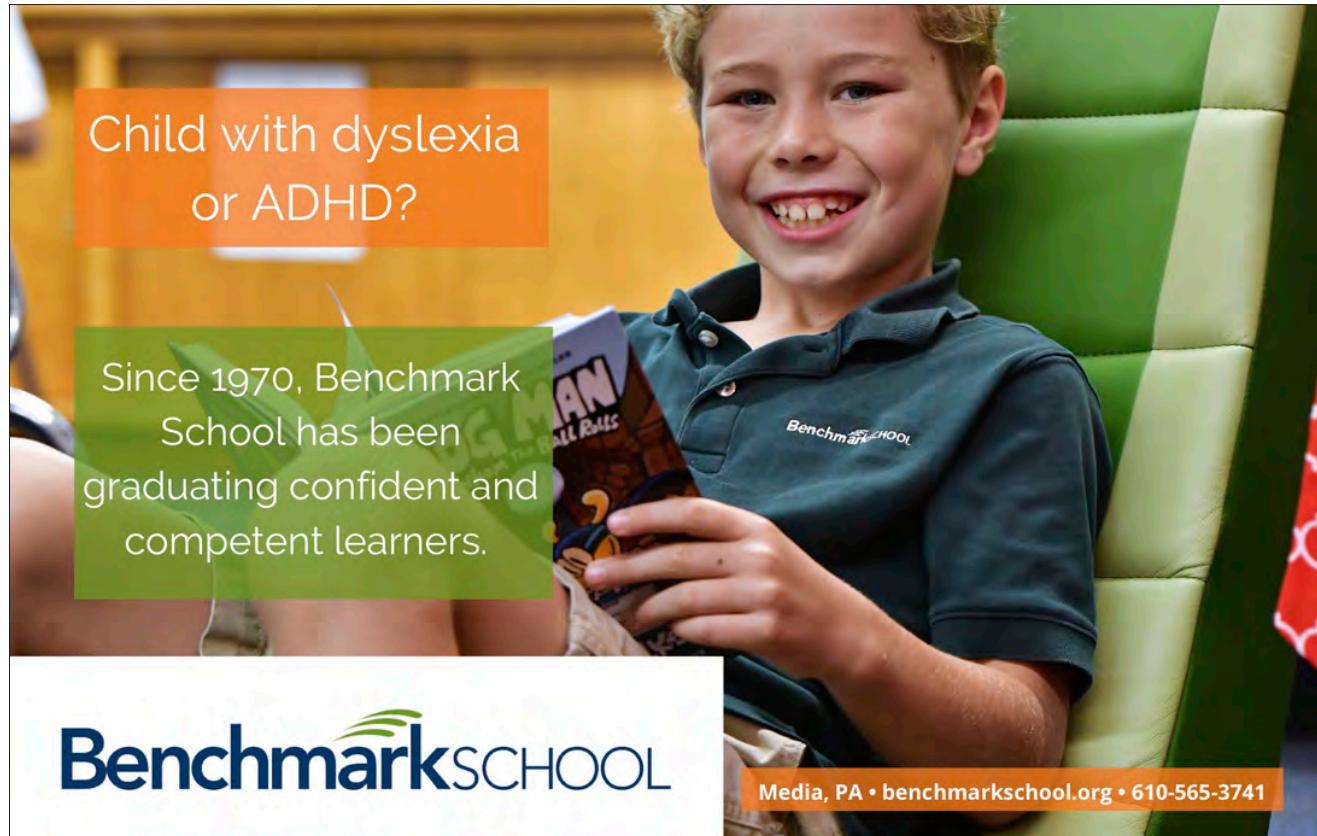
Back in January I wrote about what LGBTQ+ political ups and downs we could anticipate in 2021. So far, I think much of my forecast has become a reality. President Joe Biden and his administration are proving to be considerable allies to our families. The Biden-Harris administration has appointed a record number of qualified LGBTQ+ individuals to top bureaucratic and advisory positions, actively used social media to celebrate Pride Month, and issued the first presidential proclamation in support of Transgender Day of Visibility. Their optics, those performative aspects that get news attention, but aren't significant policy, are pretty good with spring and summer polls showing three-quarters of LGBTQ Americans approve of the president's job performance.

In terms of actual policy, we've also seen some significant gains. Since his first day in office, President Biden has issued executive orders aimed at reversing former President Trump's discriminatory bureaucratic policies. These include directing federal agencies to include sexual orientation and gender identity protection in anti-dis-

crimination policies related to employment, housing, government contracts, and military service. The Department of Defense has reversed the ban on trans people enlisting in the military. And importantly for so many families with school age kids, the Department of Education has reversed the DeVos era discriminatory policies against LGBTQ students and has explicitly stated that Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, one of the key laws that gives the national government any say so in local school policies, includes discrimination protection for LGBTQ students. Looking at both the optics and the policies, the Biden Administration has been aggressively pro-LGBTQ. Which is the good news. The inevitable bad news is that all these directives could be reversed by the next president or the U.S. Supreme Court because we still don't have a comprehensive law that extends civil rights protections to the queer community. The Equality Act, which would explicitly prohibit sexual orientation or gender identity discrimination remains stuck in Congress, having passed in the House of Representatives, but lacking the 60 votes needed to get through the Senate. That most political insiders believe the bill is

largely dead for the time being is disheartening. We also saw a setback at the Supreme Court in the *Fulton v. Philadelphia* adoption case. The Court ruled in favor of the Catholic agency's right to discriminate against same sex couples, but the silver lining is that the ruling was largely based on contractual language rather than being an overarching constitutional decision. Much like the *Masterpiece Cakeshop* decision in 2017, the justices are avoiding issuing a definitive ruling about equality and public discrimination. The question of religious

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*Aubree Calvin continued from page 60*

freedom versus equal protection remains unsettled, making passage of the Equality Act that much more important.

And admittedly, I underestimated just how aggressive the coordinated onslaught of anti-trans state legislation would be. Re-reading my January article, I devoted maybe two sentences to the issue, but it wasn't a big part of my story. That was my fault for allowing the holiday season to replace my usual slightly pessimistic nature with merriment and cheer. I leaned into optimism, a choice I'll try to refrain from in the future. The reality is that news coverage of proposed anti-trans bills dominated almost all stories related to state legislatures, sharing the spotlight with protestations against critical race theory, a legal philosophy and academic term that I'm convinced most conservative politicians can't define. Relying on data from the Human Rights Campaign, Freedom for All Americans, the Equality Foundation, and the National Transgender Law Center, this year there were over 250 bills introduced in 33 states that attempted to legislate the lives of trans kids. These bills have a variety of

harmful actions attached to them. Some bills would criminalize the actions of doctors that provide transgender healthcare to minors, including prescribing puberty blockers which have been proven safe for several medical uses. Other proposed legislation would prohibit providing gender affirming therapy or would label a parent that supports their trans or gender non-conforming child as a child abuser. These bills are based on deliberate misinformation about how child related social and medical transitions work. Of course, the most attention-grabbing bills relate specifically to trans girls playing on girls sports teams, with considerably less attention spent on which teams trans boys play on. One Tennessee law requires businesses to post signs if they permit trans people to use the bathroom that matches our gender identity. Next summer, my family was considering a trip to Dollywood. If this law is upheld, we're going to rethink that trip. These bills have largely been written by conservative interest groups and championed by state Republican lawmakers.

There are a few significant observations about these anti-LGBTQ bills. First,

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they are targeting an already vulnerable population. As mentioned earlier, queer kids already have a tough time at school, and these are buildings that we as adults make them attend. Kids don't choose to go to school, we've made that decision for them. Second, polls consistently show that most Americans across the political spectrum do not

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*Aubree Calvin continued from page 62*

support these issues. It seems few people actually want these laws. Believing kids should be respected and treated equally in school is not a divisive issue. It is disheartening that so many elected officials are trying to attack our kids to create political division.

Back to school season shouldn't be a time that queer students fear, unless that fear is because on having to take calculus. Summer should not be a mere reprieve from in school harassment and discrimination. And I truly believe every school has more teachers and staff that are supportive and affirming of LGBTQ students than are against them. Teachers wouldn't take on such a difficult job if they didn't have a true love of kids and a desire to see them grow and thrive. Most of them are doing their best, but many of the policies are written by higher level administrators. At the same time, students shouldn't have to worry about determining if a specific teacher is going to support them or harass them. They shouldn't have to worry about rules, from school districts or state legislatures, that enforce outdated and unscientific gen-

**...students shouldn't have to worry about determining if a specific teacher is going to support them or harass them. They shouldn't have to worry about rules, from school districts or state legislatures, that enforce outdated and unscientific gender norms.**

der norms. We need large scale, consistent non-discrimination policies that protect all students. We are fortunate that just like this year's barrage of cliched, generic, gender reinforcing back to school commercials are dying out, so too are most of the proposed discriminatory state bills. Of the hundreds that were filed in 2021 only a handful of laws in seven states (as of June 2021) became law, all are facing court challenges led by LGBTQ legal groups have temporarily been blocked from being

enacted. We have seen that we still cannot rely on Congress to protect our families and the rules of the political game prevent us from relying solely on one political party or elected officials to protect our families. As with the right of same sex couples to get married, and us getting some form of job discrimination protection, we are once again looking to the courts to determine what rights we as a community have. In addition to donating to LGBTQ legal groups, maybe we should encourage more of our students to become lawyers. ▼

*Aubree Calvin is a part time writer and full time professor of government at a Texas community college. She writes about race, politics, and LGBTQ issues. She is also the co-host of the podcast, [www.southernqueeries.com](http://www.southernqueeries.com), which talks to individuals about being LGBTQ in the south. Aubree and her wife, Victoria, homeschool their preteen daughter and live in North Texas. She can be contacted at [aubreecalvin@gmail.com](mailto:aubreecalvin@gmail.com) and you can read more of her writing at [www.aubreecalvin.com](http://www.aubreecalvin.com).*

Photo courtesy of Aubree Calvin



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