

I conducted this interview via zoom video call and below is a transcription. Everything I asked/said is highlighted in red. My educator's answers are in black.

KEY:

☆ - Indicates a required question

✿ - Indicates a sample question

♥ - Indicates a question made by me

☆ How long have you been in the field of education? And how long have you been at your current school?

This is my 15th year and my 8th year at this school.

☆ Where do you work?

At Aurora School in Aurora, West Virginia.

☆ What's your role in the school?

I am the, on paper, the art teacher, but I also teach Spanish and musical theater. And every kid that's a squirrely kid, just lives in my room.

✿ How would you describe the overall situation for LGBTQ plus youth in your school?

There hasn't really been any kids that feel comfortable being, like, openly out with everyone. So it's hard to gauge, like, how other people would be. But I've had lots of kids, like, tell me and tell, like, a couple other teachers, and they're just, like, 'Yeah I don't want everyone to know yet though because, I'm not sure.' I was like, 'Yeah, man. That's on you. Thank you for sharing. I will not say anything.' But there hasn't been any outwardly negative yet. We'll see. I anticipate in the next couple years because all the kids I've talked to will be in middle school in the next couple years. And so if they still feel that way, I feel like if they are comfortable talking to me about it as, like, 3rd graders, 4th graders, then when they're in middle school, they're not going to care. And then we'll see how Aurora handles it.

✿ Have you ever received training or education specifically on issues related to LGBTQ youth or families?

I have not. We have never been given any sort of, like, official training. Of course, I read things and attend things at conferences on my own. But as far as being provided, we do not do that. They just pretend it's not real.

❁ Do you consider your school to be inclusive of transgender or gender nonconforming students?

No. I do not. I think that will be a thing when kids are like, 'No. That's not what I'm going to be called' and their parents back them instead of parents that don't know and so then kids can't say anything about it. But I got one in 5th grade. Told me they told their parents. Like, 'What exactly did you come out with to your adults? Sorry. I'm just not sure, could go either way here.' And they're like, 'Oh, I'm non-binary.' I'm like, 'Oh, sweet. How'd it go?' 'Well, I texted them.' I was like, 'god forbid you walked downstairs.' 'Like, well, my mom said, 'cool. Why are you awake? Go to bed.'"

❁ Are LGBTQ people history or events addressed or included in your school curriculum at all?

We did in fact order a lot of new books, and I did see there was this giant stack of, like, kid versions of, biographies and Harvey Milk was in the stack. And I was like, is this does that can I just put it back and was like, okay? Alright. So it's there. We're not pretending.

But it's not, like, taught in the classes?

No.

But It's there. It's there.

But, yeah. There's at least some presence, but there's not any outward explanation. But when teaching about artists I was like, 'She was married to a man, but sometimes had girlfriends and boyfriends and moving on. And then that's it.' And they're like, 'Oh, k.'

♡ In your experience, how receptive are young students to learning about and accepting families with 2 moms or 2 dads? So, homosexual parents.

We have a kid in kindergarten who has 2 moms, and no one could care less. We're like, 'who's picking you up? Mom or mama?' They go, 'mama!' Alright.

That's cute!

Yeah. So, so far so good. And also one of the kids' dads came out as non binary. So that has been interesting because he's very feminine presenting, and so I've, like, had to inject myself hearing other adults speak, as you do.

♡ How does your school handle dress code policies for children who might express their gender differently than traditional norms?

Has yet to happen.

Okay. Yeah. I figured since it's such a small school, it might be a little harder to answer these.

Yeah. But are you impressed that there's more than when you were there? Like, we're stepping out!

Yea! I'm so impressed!

I thought you might be! Wow! And kids just like - this kid was like, 'That's gay,' and I was like, 'I am, not the ruler'. And they're like, 'Jones! That's not what I meant.' I was like, 'Well, that's what you said, so just start saying it's Jones.' And they just, like, looked at me, and I was like, 'Wasn't that what you're saying?' And he was like, 'Sorry'. And then that was it. Never heard it again. That was as far as I went. I'm like, 'Okay. I'm still me. Guess what? Guess what's not different? This. You just didn't see it when you were little. Now you do even though nothing's changed at all.'

♥ Are there incidents of educators or students refusing to respect a transgender youth's chosen name or pronoun?

I have had that happen. It was at Rowlesburg, my other school. It was a couple years ago, and I said 'they', and the secretary was like, 'you're talking about *her*, this girl', and I was like, 'I was not? Actually, I'm sorry that only you know of one person who wants to be called something differently, but there are 3 or 4 that I know of. - I'm sorry that they don't trust you with that. And I will continue to use names that they want to be called because their adults aren't in my class. They are.'

The parent who has come out as non binary, their wife posted a thing, and I was like, 'Oh my gosh. This is great. I think we should just use they/them with everyone, and then no one feels uncomfortable. And it's fine.' But another teacher at the school screenshotted my response to a parent of our kids who's also an educator in the county and went to the admin and said, 'If Claire's gonna try to call my kid a it, then she's got another thing coming.' I was like, 'I'm sorry? No one said it. I said *they/them*. Also, I've already been doing it. You just don't pay attention to anything.'

❁ If and when bullying of LGBTQ+ youth occurs, how is it handled by teachers or admins in the school?

I don't know that there have been any, like, specific bullying. 'You're gay!' Like, maybe they'll say, like, accuse, but no validity to it. They're just like, 'That kid's annoying!' 'But there's lots of things you can say, but I don't know why you're bringing up their sexual orientation because you guys are the ones that, like, bag tag each other all the time. That's way gayer than anything else I've seen them do.'

Yeah. -laughs-

I was like, 'I'm uncomfortable because you're 14 and you are holding your genitals in your hand because your friend is smacking you. That's, like, kind of sexual harassment. If I see it again, we're gonna call your dads and you can tell them.' And they're like 'Why?' I'm like, 'I'm not calling your moms. We're calling your dads and you can tell them why you have detention.' And they're like, 'Okay, okay.' I'll play your game to get you to stop doing it because talking about it doesn't work. I'm like, 'Do you wanna tell your dad while you're in trouble? No? Alright. Cool. Move on. Thank you.'

It's always the dad.

Always the dad with dudes.

❁ What kinds of supports are available for LGBTQ youth in your school?

Me. -laughs-

Okay!

There's not, there's not anything. Just kids talk to me, and then I, like, ask if they need anything. And then I always, like, will tell another counselor, like, hey. 'I had a kid say xyz today. Doesn't matter who the kid is. Is there any part of that that I need to share with you?' And they're like, 'Nope.' I'm like, 'Okay. Great.' And then they're fine. I'm like, okay. Sometimes it'll be the opposite, and I'll say to them, like, 'I think this is weird. You should check.' And then they'll just bring them in a small group, and they're like, 'nothing. Not anything about it.' I was like, 'Okay.' And they're like, 'Well, so you're their person. Is that fine?' Like, 'Yep. Fine with me. If anything feels like I don't know how to handle it, I just tell you so then you know? Okay. Great. Super.'

Are there any other teachers who are, like, kind of the same as you? Like, students feel comfortable coming out to them?

I don't know. I'm not sure. I think so, but I think that anything that's, like, out of the norm, like, everyone just goes to me. But our music teacher is a man, and he is gay. But this is his 1st year, and so he is, like, just treading. And I'm like, 'Yeah, man. It's fine. Like, establish yourself as a good teacher, which you are, and then you no one will say anything to you. It's like if you lead with it.' He's like, 'Right. I'm not.' And he was like, 'I mean, do I?' And I was like, 'Yes.' -laughs- 'You're very obvious to me!' And he said, 'Well, so are you!' And I was like, 'Right. I know.' So I think, like, eventually, he'll be another person perhaps. I'm not sure. He's very funny.

❁ That was actually my next question: have LGBTQ educators felt safe and supported being out at your school?

Yeah. I mean, I think so. I mean, now I do. It was not great at first, but then, like, once everyone just, like, pumped the brakes and, like, 'oh, she's actually really good at her job', then everyone just kind

of, like, let it go. And now people are like, 'Oh, is that Lauren?' I'm like, 'mhmm.' Like, I don't say like, I don't have to skirt around pronouns as much. Like, kids were saying, like, 'Are you coming to this?' I was like, 'I'm so not. It's Lauren's birthday.' 'Who's Lauren?' I was like, 'My wife's name. Spoiler, she has one! No, I'm not coming to that.' And they're like, 'Okay.' Or at music theater tryouts, and there was like a panel, and they're like, 'Who's that woman?' I was like, 'My friend's mom.. slash also my mother-in-law.' And they're like, 'What!?' And I'm saying, 'Yeah! If you didn't know, now you do!' So they know. Just like, depends on who. You know? I don't lead with it, but, certainly, now I don't feel like I have to skirt around if someone says something.

♥ How are LGBTQ related holidays like pride month acknowledged in your school, if at all?

Well, they're not because they're just not. However, it's also in the summer, so we're not in school. So we're out by then too, by June. And also no one really talks about it. But, like, I shared with some kids who I thought would be interested that there was, like, a pride in Oakland this year, and several kids' families went to it.

Okay, that's sweet!

I know. I was like, 'What!?' Like, this kid was like, 'Oh, yeah. I talked to my parents,' and I was like, 'How'd it go?' They're like, 'Fine, my whole family went to pride.' And I was like, 'I'm so proud of you! Good job kiddo.'

I love that for them! That's great.

Me too.

♥ Okay, my last question is, has there been any parent involvement in making your school more or less welcoming of LGBTQ inclusion in schools?

Yes. I would say less inclusive. Our bible club that we have, after school...

Oh, I didn't know there's a bible club! Okay.

...Uh-huh. Yep. There's a bible club. I think that at first made the kids, like, a little bit, odd towards anyone different. But then, awkwardly, one day last year, the room they were using, they couldn't use. And so I was like, 'You can use my room! It's fine. I'm not in there.' But I just, like, set their stuff up, and I snuck in to get my stuff, and the woman who I didn't know was like, 'Kids? I believe we have witnessed our first example of Christ-like behavior today.' And I was like, oh, sweet Jesus. Like wait. You have got to be freaking kidding me. I was like, oh, boy. She has no idea what's happening right now. And the kids are just like, 'Yeah.' And she's like, 'Well, what did we say? Like, you know, being kind for this and, like, well, miss Jones, let us use her room. She's not a part of our group. She, like, set it up for us when we were inconvenienced. That's putting people before yourself. So I'm

pretty sure that's what we're looking for here. So thank you!' Now the kids are just like, 'What?' And then they stopped being weird. I don't know.

It was like, oh, alright. I mean, I don't think they said anything outwardly against ever, but it was like for their people that are talking about Jesus just, like, say something positive. They're like, 'Oh, okay.' And then kids ask why I don't let them do Jesus Christmas projects. And I was like, 'Well, you can do commercial holidays, and we can do, like, bunnies because there's not a bunny that lays pastel eggs in the bible. Or we can do Santa because there's not someone about home invaders that leave you toys and steal your cookies. Santa's not in the bible. We could do that.' And they're like, 'But why not Jesus?' And I was like, 'Well, did they teach you about wood burning and color mixing at church?' And they're like, 'No.' And I was like, 'Well, then why do I need to teach you about Jesus during my time?' And they were like, 'Oh.' And I was like, 'When did you start to negotiate? Like, I've only got you 40 minutes twice a week. Our time is limited, so stay in your lane, kiddos. Mine's alright.'

Yeah.

I mean, like, no one was upset about it. Just like when they teach you art at church, we'll talk about Jesus. We won't, but I hope that never happens. -laughs-

Well, that's all my questions. Did you wanna add anything? Just generally.

No. That I mean, I think that's it. I think, well, our county actually, at the moment, has a board member that has expressed their disbelief of transgender people. He said, like, 'Don't even talk to me about trans. That's not real,' on that board. And so I obviously know about law things, I was like, that is title 9. That's your federal funding. You just broke it. And so I thought to myself and was like, okay. I'm gonna pursue it. I'm gonna take them out because someone needs to. And then I went to the board meeting to see, and I was like, I don't know if I'm gonna say anything. We'll see. Another board member when they were, like, you know, review the middens for last week. And he was like, 'I have an amendment because this person said this, which is the violation of title 9, and I am proceeding with investigations on that, so I would like for them to be public that's on the record. He said it, not just on the video and I'm moving forward.' So there he's, like, investigating, I think, like, within. He is also gay, the other man.

Oh my goodness! wow.

I know. Getting wild here. I'm just like the I was like, I'm just gonna Erin Brockovich the sh*t out of this town until people stop doing hateful, bigoted things. And it was my friend's brother that was the person on the board. And I just spoke with her. I was like, 'Listen. I respect you, but not your brother. And I don't want that to be weird for us. You and I are friends, so obviously, you don't think the way he does. But if one of my friends went after one of my siblings without giving me a heads up, I would feel some kind of way about it.' She's like, 'Thank you. I appreciate you respecting me,

but by all means, do what you need to do. You are the protector of the kids. I mean, that's yeah. Go for it.' And I was like, 'Okay. Great. Thank you.'

What a small town. Crazy how you have to do that.

Such a small town. I know, right? Because there's, like, 10 people.