IES Institute of Education Sciences

Building Inclusive and Equitable Learning Environments

All students need access to inclusive and equitable learning environments.

Inclusive and equitable learning environments create conditions that enable students to realize their potential. *Inclusive environments* ensure that access to education is available to all, regardless of ability.[1] *Equitable environments* ensure that educational resources—whether physical (such as buildings, classrooms) or human (such as teachers)[2]—are available to all students, based on their needs. When afforded these environments, students are more likely to develop a sense of belonging, engage more in learning, and perform better academically.[3] Without these environments, education systems disenfranchise students, and, ultimately, communities suffer in deep and lasting ways.

State and local decisions contribute to the development of inclusive and equitable learning environments.

Support for, and the alignment of policies, practices, and resources at all levels of public education are necessary to develop and sustain inclusive and equitable learning environments. Decisions at the state and local levels focused on inclusion and equitable policies and practices, along with resource allocation, influence the practices of building-level educators in ways that affect how students experience inclusion and equity in schools. Building-level policies and practices that align with district and state policies tend to persist and are more likely to achieve their intended outcomes.[4]

State and local leaders are partnering with the regional educational laboratories (RELs) to reimagine, study, and continuously improve inclusive and equitable learning environments.

The cross-REL working group focused on *Building Inclusive and Equitable Learning Environments* highlights examples of efforts that states, districts, and schools—in partnership with multiple RELs—engage in across all levels. These examples shine a light on this multilevel work, which strives to establish inclusive and equitable learning environments to achieve improved outcomes for students, especially those traditionally underserved by our education systems.

State-level efforts

State-level efforts focus on improving student sense of belonging, staff well-being, developing culturally sustaining instructional models, and examining the relationship between school climate and student outcomes.

REL Appalachia

In Virginia, REL Appalachia collaborates with partners from the community college system office and eight campuses to enhance faculty and staff capacity to use trauma-sensitive and equitable practices to increase students' sense of belonging and develop a community of care on campus. The efforts focus on supporting faculty and staff in implementing these practices with resources and formative data protocols for continuous improvement.

REL Mid-Atlantic

In Pennsylvania, REL Mid-Atlantic is supporting regional social-emotional wellness leaders as they plan and implement evidence-based approaches to improve student and staff well-being. The partnership recognizes the importance of creating safe and supportive environments for all school community members.

REL Pacific

REL Pacific is supporting education leaders in the Federated States of Micronesia to create inclusive and equitable environments by supporting the development of culturally sustaining instructional models. These models support student learning and performance on national learning standards, while meeting the contextual needs of local communities.

REL Southeast

In Georgia, REL Southeast is working with the Georgia Department of Education to investigate links between efforts to improve reading proficiency rates and dimensions of school climate that are associated with positive student academic outcomes.

Local-level efforts focus on improving students' sense of belonging, thus supporting transitions, personalized learning opportunities and outcomes, middle school math achievement, and student-centered literacy practices.

REL Central

In Colorado, REL Central is supporting educators in Denver Public Schools improve student transitions from eighth to ninth grade. Students' perceptions of their experiences in grade 9 will investigate experiences that facilitate or inhibit their successful transition from grade 8 to grade 9, using math skills as the focus. This effort will help students develop math capabilities and a math identity.

REL Midwest

Across the region, REL Midwest is partnering with districts to integrate student-centered and culturally responsive practices into school learning experiences; use data to identify disparities in sense of belonging and engagement; and develop efforts to act on disparities in student experiences in middle school. In Ohio, REL Midwest is working with Akron Public Schools on a data-informed approach for high schools that will focus on improving student sense of belonging by reducing the use of exclusionary discipline policies and practices that inequitably affect students of color and students receiving special education services.

REL Northeast & Islands

In Connecticut, REL-NEI is supporting district leaders to expand equitable opportunities for multilingual learners in mathematics in the middle grades by using evidence-based strategies. This includes the use of visual representations of mathematical concepts as well as strategies for supporting language use in mathematics for multilingual learners. This support will also include a study focused on teacher and learner outcomes from the professional learning series.

REL Northwest

In Washington, REL Northwest is partnering with Seattle Public Schools to address long-standing disparities in the math achievement of seventh graders by developing a system of measures to support educators collecting and making use of formative data to improve math teaching.

REL Southwest

REL Southwest is helping New Mexico educators deliver evidence-based literacy instruction that supports all students, including English learner students. With input from several districts across the state, REL Southwest is testing Write to Succeed professional learning to help grades 4–8 teachers learn how to incorporate scaffolded writing practices within their existing curricula, in any content area, and for students of all language backgrounds. The program supports teachers through effective teacher–peer collaboration and role-playing student-centered instructional practices.

REL West

In California, REL West is partnering with the Los Angeles County Office of Education to improve the attendance, mobility, and graduation outcomes of K–12 students in foster care. By focusing on strengthening data quality and data use, this effort aims to reduce barriers to learning and help educators provide more effective interventions for these students.

References

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