Studying the Implementation of Equity Projects in Science Education in Divisive Political Contexts

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ABSTRACT ORIGINAL

The implementation of equity-oriented reforms is never simply a technical matter: it involves directly engaging with the norms and politics responsible for reproducing inequitable opportunities and outcomes, and with efforts to promote educational justice. To date, there has been little research on how leaders in science education navigate the political environments of schooling to engage in equity work in their local contexts. The current political divisions within and among states regarding teaching about racial equity provide an important and timely context for such study. This study examines equity projects that science education leaders engage in and how these relate to recently passed legislation in several states regarding teaching about race and its ongoing role in shaping American society and institutions. It relies on survey data from science education leaders in 33 states, focusing on their familiarity with and involvement in different kinds of equity projects in science education, along with their perceptions of what supports and what hinders their equity-focused work. Employing a mixed methods approach, including descriptive analysis, hierarchical linear modeling, and thematic analysis, we found that engagement in equity projects varied widely across and within states. However, in states with laws promoting equity, leaders were engaged in more racial equity-related projects than in states with legislation that restrict discussion of matters of race, so-called "gag orders". These findings underscore the significance of the broader political environments in shaping science education leadership and present opportunities for researchers in the field to support leaders in navigating them. © 2024 Wiley Periodicals LLC.