

Toward the Creation of Highly Reliable Public Education in the U.S. and the U.K.

Over the last 30 years, U.S. students' scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress have been flat to rising slightly, while the consequences for students and the nation of students failure to achieve at high levels have risen dramatically. High school graduation rates have not risen or fallen from the current 69-72% in a generation, college graduation rates are relatively stable at 25-31%. Yet from the 60 years beginning in 1949, the differential impact of failing to graduate from high school vs. college graduation has risen from around 30% to over 250%. Failure in education is becoming an individual and a national disaster.

This session will examine a range of issues associated with the challenges awaiting educators attempting to improve the quality of education, and the value of using a High Reliability Organization (HRO) framework in order to most effectively address those challenges. Dr. Thomas Bellamy has published on the theoretical advantages of an HRO orientation to school improvement over multiple, currently dominant ways to thinking through school improvement. His paper will be titled, "Imagining Fail-Safe Schools."

Drs. Stringfield, Schaffer, and Reynolds will present eight-year follow-up data from their multi-year efforts in the United Kingdom to positively affect secondary students' achievements in three Local Education Authorities (LEAs) through the use of HRO principles. The result in the Welsh LEA has been dramatic. The LEA has been repeatedly found to be the most "value added" district in Wales, and the size of the spread has grown over most of a decade. The Northern England LEA has seen similar gains on the national GCSE examinations, such that for three consecutive years it was declared to be among the 10 most rapidly improving LEAs in the nation. A third British LEA has been successful, and efforts to transport the HRO processes into a three-year American "School Effectiveness/HRO" project have been frustrating. The authors will discuss possible causes of the remarkable successes, and possible reasons why the other change efforts were significantly less successful. This will lead to suggestions for future efforts to create more reliable schooling in both countries.