2018 SRA Biennial Meeting

April 12-14, 2018
Minneapolis, MN

Invited Program Keynote Speaker

Education, Inequality, and Opportunity in America

Sean Reardon, Stanford University

Abstract. The "American Dream" promises young people in America equal educational and economic opportunity. And education is widely imagined to be the pathway to economic opportunity. But are our schools engines of equal opportunity or agents of inequality? To answer this, I use a new dataset—based on 300 million test score records from every public school in the United States—to describe the landscape of educational opportunity in America, with a particular focus on how opportunity is distributed by race, ethnicity, and social class. The data show that economic inequality and segregation play powerful roles in shaping educational opportunity. Schooling, in contrast, appears to only modestly impact patterns of inequality. It will take more than improved schools to make the American Dream a reality.

Biography. Sean Reardon is the endowed Professor of Poverty and Inequality in Education and is Professor (by courtesy) of Sociology at Stanford University. His research focuses on the causes, patterns, trends, and consequences of social and educational inequality, the effects of educational policy on educational and social inequality, and in applied statistical methods for educational research. In addition, he develops methods of measuring social and educational inequality (including the measurement of segregation and achievement gaps) and methods of causal inference in educational and social science research. He teaches graduate courses in applied statistical methods, with a particular emphasis on the application of experimental and quasi-experimental methods to the investigation of issues of educational policy and practice. Sean received his doctorate in education in 1997 from Harvard University. He is a member of the National Academy of Education and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He is also a recipient of the William T. Grant Foundation Scholar Award, the National Academy of Education Postdoctoral Fellowship, and an Andrew Carnegie Fellow.