Colorado’s natural resources, economies, and way of life are under enormous pressure as the population continues to grow and ecosystems experience the early impacts of climate change. How will Colorado adapt to a future with less snow and less water for rivers, cities, and agriculture? How can rural mountain and plains communities position themselves to respond to larger and more frequent wildfires? How will formerly fossil fuel-dependent communities navigate a changing global economy and thrive into the future?

Colorado’s students are best positioned to address these challenges — bringing an unprecedented opportunity for engagement, learning, innovation, and investment. Charting a path forward that allows both natural and human systems to thrive is one of the biggest challenges facing our next generation.

The Opportunity

Individual schools and school districts — especially in rural and mountain areas most impacted by climate change — may not have the resources to develop a comprehensive curriculum and career pathways to prepare students to address one of the greatest challenges of our time. We envision a formal collaboration that brings high schools in multiple school districts together with a multi-campus higher education partner(s) to address this challenge. The common goal is to prepare Colorado students to work in jobs and industries that advance key issues in climate change through a coordinated, multidisciplinary experience in three focus areas: (1) academic programming, (2) workforce readiness, and (3) student leadership and collaboration.
Focus Areas

1. **Academic Programming**
   Create an engaging, challenging, student-centered academic program that inspires Colorado’s youth to address the important environmental, scientific, political, and sociological changes facing the state and their generation.
   - Students focus on climate change-related subjects such as Agriculture, Forestry, Tourism, Fire Science, Watershed and Natural Resource Management, Permaculture, Sustainability, Education, Economics, Communications, and Media.
   - School districts partner with higher education institutions to ensure concurrent enrollment courses are relevant to a climate-change focus.

2. **Workforce Readiness**
   Partner with local businesses and nonprofits to provide students with exposure to career opportunities in fields and industries that are addressing climate change, such as:
   - Ski resorts and tourism-related industries
   - Renewable and clean energy technology firms
   - Conservation-focused organizations
   - Mining companies
   - Ranching and farming operations
   - Media partners
   - Government entities
   - Environmental technology developers
   - Law and policy firms
   - Philanthropic foundations
   - Infrastructure entities

3. **Student Leadership Development**
   Engage students through both academic programming and career training opportunities, by equipping them to:
   - Learn from one another through shared projects
   - Work together over web-based platforms
   - Interact confidently with business, education, and policy leaders
   - Participate in convenings to deeply explore the challenges each community is facing

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**Why Focus on Climate Change?**

**For students and families:**
- Provides exposure to new and valuable career opportunities
- Increases resources for students to pursue a wide range of academic interests within a cohesive and growing focus area
- Connects students to more growth opportunities to help their local community

**For educators:**
- Provides opportunities to engage with new and exciting content
- Develops partnerships with educators across districts and higher education

**For school districts:**
- Enables schools to offer more and varied programming to students
- Positions Colorado students, schools, and communities at the forefront of an important global challenge

**For companies, nonprofits, and communities:**
- Identifies students who are motivated and educated to work in jobs of the future
- Engages students in workforce-relevant learning that is grounded in their local context

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**Proposed Structure**

Lyra Colorado, a new organization committed to district and school innovation, and its partners Empower Schools and the Gates Family Foundation, will support interested school districts and higher ed institutions by creating a framework to develop policies, address governance challenges, and bring resources, people, and opportunities together for this bold new initiative.