



# Key Issues: Bringing Environmental Issues to the Classroom

A program of The Keystone Center for Education



## Overview:

**Key Issues: Bringing Environmental Issues to the Classroom** is a national teacher training Institute that provides middle level educators with the process, skills and confidence to investigate current environmental issues with their students using The Keystone Center's non-biased framework.



## The Key Issues Framework

**Process Approach:** The Key Issues curriculum brings the process of inquiry to the study of environmental issues. The Key Issues Framework provides middle level educators with step-by-step instructions to guide students through an investigation of all sides of the issue.

**Interdisciplinary:** The curriculum integrates science, math, social studies, and language arts throughout the investigation. Teams of teachers from the same school or district are selected to integrate what they learn into their curricula.

**Integration of Ideas:** The Institute incorporates effective and innovative ideas, activities and methods, including SEPUP, conflict resolution and mediation, role playing and simulations, as well as small group work and lab activities.

**Standards-Based:** The Framework guides educators in a standards-based instructional process. The curriculum addresses national standards from multiple disciplines while meeting state and district guidelines.

**Easily Transferable:** The Key Issues Framework is applicable to each educator's particular needs. Participants are encouraged to apply the steps of the Framework to any environmental issue.

## Highlights of the Institute

**Non-biased Approach**  
Teachers are introduced to a new way of thinking about their approach to contentious issues. They learn strategies to identify and remove their own bias in order to facilitate student inquiry.

**Key Issues Staff**  
The Keystone Center staff members are former classroom teachers who have been trained in the organization's non-biased pedagogy. Staff is supported by facilitators who are past participants actively using the Framework to investigate environmental issues with their students.

**Setting**  
Using spectacular ecosystems, Key Issues combines classroom time with outdoor exploration of the natural environment.

**Resources**  
All participants receive complete curriculum. Every lesson plan is organized and aligned to national standards. SEPUP labs are given to participants to aid implementation.

**Networking**  
Teachers from across the country share best practices, successful classroom activities and form lasting professional connections.

**Partners in Education**  
Following the Institute, educators are matched with a Resource Liaison from their sponsoring organization. Resource Liaisons could work with teachers and students to gather data, share expertise or to provide students another perspective.

**Course Credit**  
Educators who successfully complete Key Issues have the option of receiving two graduate level credits from Colorado School of Mines at a minimal cost.



# Components of the Key Issues Institute

## Simulation

Using a simulated issue allows educators to practice the steps of investigation.

From issue identification to potential solutions and implementation, each step of the Framework is actively modeled.

## Local Issue

Participants explore a local environmental issue as an example of how they can involve their students in an issue investigation in their community.

## Small Group Explorations

During the week-long session, teachers are grouped in grade level - subject area configurations to discuss and explore ways to adapt Key Issues lessons to better address issues with their students.



Above, Key Issues participants enjoy the outdoor classroom during an excursion to the Continental Divide



## Evaluation

A year-long evaluation of the Key Issues Institute, conducted by Collaborative Research Associates (CRA), revealed an effective, well-run teacher professional development program. Selected findings from the evaluation report indicate:

85% of teachers rated Key Issues as either extremely beneficial or very beneficial to them professionally.

More than 75% reported that Key Issues had increased their ability to teach about environmental issues and/or had increased their enthusiasm for teaching.

More than 50% reported that their skill in using non-biased teaching methods had improved and/or their science and technology knowledge had increased.

On average, each teacher implemented Key issues in the classroom with 96 students during the school year. 64% had used Key Issues in more than one lesson or class. 54% used more than half of the Key Issues methods/materials. 89% implemented Key Issues in grades 5 through 8, and 82% used Key Issues in science classes.

## 2010 Key Issues Institutes

Key Issues Session 1: June 22—27, 2010  
Silverthorne, CO

Key Issues Session 2: July 13—18, 2010  
Silverthorne, CO

Key Issues Session 3: August 3—  
August 8, 2010  
Silverthorne, CO

For further information on The Keystone Center's Key Issues Institutes, contact:

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**"The time I spent here was the most incredible, applicable opportunity for professional development I have ever attended. Not only have I learned so much myself, but I see the endless knowledge my students will gain."**

Kathy Keeney  
Lombardi Middle School

**CHART 21: Teachers Believed Key Issues Had Positive Effects on Their Students' Knowledge and Skills (2006 N=88 Respondents)**

