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## Szczurek: Colorado's workforce crossroads — and why GlobalMindED matters now



By Theresa Szczurek

Colorado's economy remains resilient by many traditional measures, but beneath the strong headlines lies growing uncertainty for employers and the next generation of workers.

Recent college graduates are entering one of the most difficult job markets in years. National reports show unemployment for recent graduates has climbed above the national average for the first time in decades, while employers are slowing hiring for entry-level roles amid economic caution and rapid advances in artificial intelligence.

At the same time, employers across Colorado continue searching for adaptable talent in healthcare, advanced manufacturing, aerospace, cybersecurity, logistics, energy, and technology. The challenge is no longer simply finding workers. It is finding people who can combine technical expertise with communication skills, resilience, collaboration, creativity, and continuous learning.

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That disconnect is becoming increasingly visible in Colorado.

The Colorado Sun recently reported that job openings have flattened as the tech economy softens and employers become more selective in hiring. Other workforce reports show unemployed workers are spending longer searching for jobs while companies carefully screen candidates for both technical and interpersonal skills.

Artificial intelligence is accelerating this transformation. Employers increasingly use AI tools while simultaneously reevaluating which human capabilities remain essential. Networking, mentorship, adaptability, and emotional intelligence are becoming even more valuable differentiators for students entering the workforce.

That is precisely why the GlobalMindED conference, returning to Denver June 10-12, matters.

Now in its 12th year, GlobalMindED brings together more than 1,000 leaders and 400 experts from education, business, government, philanthropy, and workforce development to address one central question: how do we ensure all students can access opportunity in an AI-driven economy? The conference includes more than 90 breakout sessions and an Industry Marketplace featuring more than 100 hiring companies in partnership with the Colorado Department of Labor.

"As AI and workforce disruption accelerate, the need to connect education to real-world opportunity has never been more urgent," said Carol Carter, CEO of GlobalMindED. "We bring together leaders committed to ensuring every student has access to opportunity, networks, and career pathways—so economic mobility becomes possible for all."

Unlike many conferences focused only on ideas, GlobalMindED is intentionally action-oriented. The organization directly connects first-generation and under-resourced students with mentors, internships, and employers.

The results are tangible.

Brian Ysasaga, now a systems engineer at Lockheed Martin, credits GlobalMindED mentors with helping him build confidence, networking skills, and career direction while attending MSU Denver. CPR News reported that Ysasaga — the first in his family to graduate from high school and college — connected through GlobalMindED with a retired Lockheed Martin mentor who coached him on interviewing, coursework, networking, and career preparation. Today, Ysasaga returns to the conference as a speaker and mentor.

Another student, Emerald Bryant, a psychology and sociology student from Western Colorado University, attended the conference and left with an internship after networking directly with employers. She gained this experience in addition to her cashier job at Kroger and her track and field leadership.

Stories like these illustrate the power of "social capital" — the networks and relationships that often determine career access but remain unavailable to many first-generation and under-resourced students.

The conference also provides students with visible role models who demonstrate what leadership looks like. Among the Exceptional Leader Award honorees this year is Dr. Donna Lynne, CEO of Denver Health and former lieutenant governor of Colorado, recognized for her leadership in healthcare, education, and community impact. The message to students is clear: "If these leaders can succeed, so can you."

Business and philanthropic leaders recognize the importance of this work. Sponsors including Morgan Stanley, El Pomar Foundation, Colorado Health Foundation, UCHHealth, Base44, and others support GlobalMindED because they understand Colorado's future economy depends on building stronger pathways between education and employment.

Research increasingly shows that internships, mentorships, and experiential learning are critical differentiators in today's labor market. Students who participate in these experiences gain a significant advantage in securing employment after graduation.

At a time when many conversations about AI focus on fear and disruption, GlobalMindED focuses on preparation, connection, and possibility. The conference offers practical solutions, partnerships, and direct access to talent.

Interested in workforce development and talent pipelines? Attend the conference — especially the free Industry Marketplace on Friday, June 12, which is open to the public. Learn more and register at [GlobalMindED.org](http://GlobalMindED.org).

*Theresa M. Szczurek, CEO of Technology and Management Solutions, a tech entrepreneur and former state of Colorado chief information officer, helps organizations grow to new heights. [www.TMSworld.com](http://www.TMSworld.com)*

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