

# THE WHOLE LEARNER

## A Global Literacy Initiative

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### E X E C U T I V E S U M M A R Y

Framework | Asynchronous Professional Development Course | IMSE LAB Integration

## The Opportunity

Here's the honest truth about education right now: we're really good at teaching kids to pass tests, and we're nowhere near good enough at preparing them for actual life. Students who score well on reading comprehension can't tell the difference between a peer-reviewed study and a blog post. Teenagers who crush algebra fall for basic statistical manipulation. Young adults graduate with honors and then struggle to manage a project, work on a team, or recover from failure.

The skills aren't missing because teachers don't care. They're missing because our frameworks don't name them, our standards don't organize them, and our systems don't track them. What doesn't get named doesn't get taught—at least not systematically, not equitably, and not across every grade level with intentional progression.

The Whole Learner initiative addresses this gap head-on through three interconnected components: a comprehensive PreK–12 Global Literacy Framework, a practitioner-facing asynchronous professional development course, and a powerful integration with IMSE LAB that makes the entire system searchable, trackable, and actionable at the classroom level.

The research is clear on one thing: teacher quality is the single most important school-level variable influencing student achievement (Desimone, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). But teachers can't teach what no framework names, no standards document organizes, and no system tracks. That's the gap this initiative fills—and the research base supporting its design is robust.

This executive summary outlines what we've built, how the pieces connect, and why this represents a significant partnership and investment opportunity in the future of comprehensive education.

## The Global Literacy Framework

The Global Literacy Framework starts with a different premise than most educational standards: literacy isn't a single skill. It's the full set of competencies a person needs to navigate, interpret, create, and contribute across every domain of human experience. Reading and writing? Absolutely. But also reasoning quantitatively, thinking scientifically, processing information critically, understanding yourself as a learner, managing your emotions, participating in civic life, and about a dozen other things that matter enormously and rarely get taught with any coherence.

### By the Numbers

<b>11</b>	Literacy domains spanning three competency categories
<b>62</b>	Subdomains organizing the full scope of human competence
<b>281</b>	Discrete, teachable, trackable elements
<b>2,679</b>	Grade-level learning goals from PreK through 12th grade
<b>9+</b>	National and international standards aligned

## Three Competency Categories

The framework organizes everything into three categories that answer a simple question: *Where is this competency directed?*

**Intrapersonal Competencies** (113 elements) cover how students manage themselves—cognitive literacy, information literacy, and physical and health literacy. These are the internal engines. A student who can't regulate their emotions, manage their attention, or monitor their own understanding will struggle with everything else, no matter how good the content instruction is.

**Interpersonal Competencies** (108 elements) address how students engage with others—communication, civic and social literacy, cultural literacy, entrepreneurial literacy, visual literacy, and foreign language foundations. The world doesn't operate in isolation, and interpersonal competencies determine whether a student's brilliance actually translates into meaningful contribution.

**Embedded Competencies** (60 elements) are the disciplines that cut across everything—mathematical literacy and scientific literacy. These aren't "subjects" in the traditional sense. They're ways of thinking that show up everywhere, from evaluating news sources to making personal health decisions.

## What Makes This Different

Plenty of frameworks exist. So what makes this one worth paying attention to? A few things.

First, it's genuinely comprehensive. It doesn't just cover academics—it maps the full scope of what "educated" actually means, from metacognition to cultural awareness to iterative thinking. Most frameworks pick a lane. This one finally draws the whole map.

Second, every single learning goal is engineered with cognitive progression mapped to Bloom's Taxonomy, Quality Indicators that define what proficient performance looks like, explicit prerequisite skills, and alignment to nine-plus national and international standards including ISTE, CASEL, C3, ACTFL, P21, NGSS, CCSS, NCAS, and SHAPE America.

Third, it connects what currently lives in silos. A single third-grade learning goal might align simultaneously to ISTE, CASEL, C3, ACTFL, and P21—five different standards frameworks that until now lived in five different documents, five different professional development tracks, and five different conversations. The Global Literacy Framework doesn't replace any of those standards. It connects them. Same kid. Same competencies. Finally, the same conversation.

## Cognitive Progression Model

The framework's cognitive progression is anchored in Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), one of the most widely adopted and empirically validated frameworks in education for structuring learning objectives and assessing cognitive complexity. Research consistently demonstrates that aligning instruction to a deliberate cognitive progression—where students master foundational skills before advancing to higher-order thinking—leads to deeper learning and greater transfer of knowledge across contexts (Bloom, 1956; Krathwohl, 2002). The framework applies this principle systematically across all 281 elements:

**PreK–K:** Remembering & Understanding | **Grades 1–2:** Understanding & Applying  
**Grades 3–4:** Applying & Analyzing | **Grades 5–6:** Analyzing  
**Grades 7–9:** Evaluating | **Grades 10–12:** Evaluating & Creating

This pattern holds remarkably consistent across all eleven domains and all 281 elements. It takes the guesswork out of “age-appropriate rigor”—a fourth-grade teacher doesn’t have to wonder whether asking students to evaluate sources is developmentally reasonable. The framework answers that clearly.

## Portrait of a Graduate

The framework includes holistic “Portrait of a Graduate” narratives at every grade level that describe what a well-developed student actually looks like—not as a list of test scores, but as a real person. Each portrait covers the student as a Learner, Communicator, Mathematician, Scientist, Social Being, Creative Thinker, Physical Being, and Digital Citizen.

These portraits follow a developmental arc from the **Confident Explorer** (PreK) through the **Emerging Scholar, Independent Learner, Analytical Thinker**, and on to the **Global Citizen** who graduates ready to think critically, communicate clearly, create boldly, and contribute meaningfully to communities both local and global.

## The Asynchronous Professional Development Course

A framework—no matter how well designed—is only as good as the educators who understand and use it. And here’s the reality: teachers are stretched thin, professional development budgets are tight, and the last thing anyone needs is another sit-through-this-workshop mandate that checks a compliance box and changes nothing.

The research backs this up. A landmark Learning Policy Institute review of 35 methodologically rigorous studies found that effective professional development must be content-focused, incorporate active learning, support collaboration, use models of effective practice, offer feedback and reflection opportunities, and be of sustained duration (Darling-Hammond, Hyster, & Gardner, 2017). Desimone’s (2009) widely cited conceptual framework for PD effectiveness identifies five core features: content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation. One-shot workshops consistently fail to change practice; sustained, iterative learning over weeks or months is what actually moves the needle.

A 2025 meta-analysis of 102 quantitative studies on online professional development found medium effect sizes on both teacher-level outcomes (Hedges’  $g = 0.71$ ) and classroom-level outcomes (Hedges’  $g = 0.55$ ), confirming that well-designed online PD can meaningfully change both teacher knowledge and instructional practice (Morina et al., 2025, *Computers & Education*). Critically, the study found that PD quality characteristics—including cognitive activation, structured content, and collaboration—were significant moderators of impact.

That’s why we built “The Whole Learner” as a fully asynchronous professional development course. It meets educators where they are—on their own schedules, at their own pace, in their own contexts—while incorporating every characteristic the research identifies as essential for PD that actually shifts practice.

## Course Architecture

The course is structured as ten learning arcs, each designed as a standalone module that also builds on what came before. Every arc follows a four-session learning cycle:

### Four-Session Learning Cycle

**Session 1 — Activate:** Opening hooks, pre-assessment, activating prior knowledge

**Session 2 — Build:** Core content delivery through scripted videos, interactive activities, case studies

**Session 3 — Apply:** Practice tasks, portfolio pieces, real-world application to participants' own classrooms  
**Session 4 — Reflect:** Discussion prompts, self-assessment, preview of next arc

## The Eight Learning Arcs

Arc	Title	Focus
1	<b>Why Global Literacy</b>	The case for redefining literacy; the problem we're solving
2	<b>The Architecture</b>	Cognitive progression, Tools of Thought, Quality Indicators, prerequisite chains
3	<b>The Internal Engine</b>	Cognitive Literacy and Information Literacy (intrapersonal)
4	<b>Finding Your Voice</b>	Communication Literacy and Visual Literacy (interpersonal)
5	<b>Thinking in Numbers &amp; Evidence</b>	Mathematical Literacy and Scientific Literacy (embedded)
6	<b>Showing Up in the World</b>	Civic/Social Literacy, Cultural Literacy, Entrepreneurial Literacy
7	<b>The Meta-Skill</b>	Iterative Literacy and Foreign Language Foundations
8	<b>Seeing the Whole Student</b>	Portrait of a Graduate narratives across all grade levels

## What Each Arc Contains

This isn't a slide deck with a quiz at the end. Every arc is a fully developed learning experience that includes:

- **Fully scripted video segments** with clear learning objectives, real-world examples, and on-screen guidance
- **Interactive activities** with complete answer keys—not just “discuss with a partner” but structured tasks with expected outcomes
- **Case studies** drawn from realistic school scenarios with diagnostic questions that push participants to apply framework concepts to messy, real-world situations
- **Discussion prompts** with follow-up thread options designed to generate genuine professional dialogue, not performative posts
- **Quick checks** for comprehension monitoring throughout each session
- **Practice tasks designated as portfolio pieces** that participants build across the full course, creating a tangible professional artifact
- **Self-assessments** tied directly to arc learning goals

## Course Voice and Design Philosophy

The course is written for busy, skeptical, smart educators. The tone is conversational and direct—no jargon walls, no theoretical abstractions without practical payoff. Every concept gets grounded in specific classroom examples. Every framework element gets connected to what teachers are already doing. The design philosophy: if it doesn't change something about how you plan, teach, assess, or think about your students, it doesn't belong in the course.

The course also deliberately models the framework's own principles. The four-session Activate–Build–Apply–Reflect cycle mirrors the iterative, metacognitive approach the framework promotes. Participants don't just learn about metacognition and iterative thinking—they experience it through the course structure itself.

### Research Alignment: How The Whole Learner Maps to Effective PD Characteristics

**Content-focused** (Desimone, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017): Every arc targets specific framework domains with concrete classroom applications

**Active learning** (Desimone, 2009): Case studies, practice tasks, and interactive activities—not passive lecture consumption

**Coherence** (Desimone, 2009): Aligned to national standards (ISTE, CASEL, C3, NGSS, CCSS, P21) already in educators' work

**Sustained duration** (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017): Ten arcs across an extended period, with iterative application between sessions

**Collaboration & reflection** (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017): Discussion prompts, portfolio building, and self-assessment woven throughout

**Cognitive activation** (Morina et al., 2025): Structured to provoke genuine professional thinking, not performative completion

## Learning Progressions

The learning progressions are the backbone of the entire initiative—the developmental spine that connects a preschooler's first steps to a graduating senior's sophisticated competencies. Understanding how they work is essential for anyone evaluating this initiative's potential.

### How Progressions Work

Each of the 281 elements in the framework has a complete learning progression that maps skill development from PreK through 12th grade. But these aren't just thirteen versions of the same goal getting slightly harder. Each progression is engineered with three interlocking components:

- **Cognitive level progression** (Bloom's Taxonomy)—skills advance from Remembering through Understanding, Applying, Analyzing, Evaluating, and Creating in a predictable developmental pattern
- **Quality Indicators** —three descriptors at each cognitive level that define what proficient performance looks like (e.g., Frequent/Accurate/On Topic at the Remembering level; Credible/Original/Substantive at the Creating level)
- **Explicit prerequisite chains** —every goal names the prior-year skill it builds on, creating a traceable line from preschool to graduation

### A Concrete Example

Take "Source Evaluation" from Information Literacy. Here's how a single element progresses:

#### Source Evaluation — Progression Snapshot

**PreK:** "Recognize that some people know more about certain things than others." (Level 1: Remembering)

**Grade 1:** "Understand that books and websites can have different levels of trustworthiness." (Level 2: Understanding)

**Grade 5:** "Apply source evaluation criteria to distinguish reliable from unreliable information." (Level 3: Applying)

**Grade 6:** "Analyze sources for bias, perspective, and potential conflicts of interest." (Level 4: Analyzing)

**Grade 9:** "Evaluate scholarly and non-scholarly sources for academic research purposes." (Level 5: Evaluating)

**Grade 12:** "Analyze complex source ecosystems and apply sophisticated evaluation criteria for research." (Level 6: Creating)

That's not six disconnected goals—it's one continuous developmental thread where each year's work makes the next year's work possible. And this same architecture repeats across all 281 elements.

## Vertical and Horizontal Alignment

Research on curriculum alignment consistently shows a strong positive correlation with student achievement. Webb (1997) defines curriculum alignment as the degree to which expectations and assessments work together to guide students toward learning what they're expected to know and do. Multiple studies have demonstrated that when standards, instruction, and assessment are tightly aligned—both vertically across grade levels and horizontally across subjects—student outcomes improve significantly, and the impact of socioeconomic status on achievement is reduced (McGhee & Griffith, 2001; DiBiase, Warren, & Wagner, 2001).

**Vertical alignment** is the long game—ensuring that what a student learns in second grade connects meaningfully to what they'll need in seventh. Vertical alignment ensures that learners' experience of knowledge and new skills occurs incrementally, building upon preceding learning encounters (Watermeyer, 2011). The framework's prerequisite chains make this explicit. Every learning goal names the specific prior skill it depends on, so when a student struggles, educators can trace backward through the progression to find exactly where the gap is. This is particularly critical for skills that are sequential and ascending in complexity—which describes virtually every element in the Global Literacy Framework.

**Horizontal alignment** is the cross-domain view—showing how skills at the same grade level connect across different literacy domains. A fifth-grade science lesson on ecosystems simultaneously develops Scientific Literacy, Communication Literacy, Mathematical Literacy, and Iterative Literacy. The framework makes these connections visible so teachers can be intentional about developing multiple competencies through the same learning experience. Research from standards alignment literature confirms that curricula designed with both vertical and horizontal coherence help schools make better decisions, reduce redundancy, and ensure students develop skills in the right order at the right depth (CSAI/WestEd, 2017; EdReports, 2022).

## The IMSE LAB Integration

Here's where it all comes together in a way that makes the framework operationally powerful—not just theoretically impressive.

IMSE LAB is an established digital platform built by the Institute for Multi-Sensory Education that already serves thousands of educators with lesson planning, assessment, and progress monitoring tools for structured literacy instruction. It's an intuitive, teacher-facing platform that school districts trust and already use. Integrating the Global Literacy Framework into IMSE LAB means giving educators a single digital environment where the framework's 2,679 learning goals become searchable, filterable, and directly connected to instructional planning and assessment.

### What the Integration Enables

The IMSE LAB integration is designed to make the framework a daily-use tool, not a reference document gathering dust on a shelf. Here's what that looks like in practice:

#### Searchable Learning Outcomes

Educators can search the complete framework by domain, subdomain, element, grade level, cognitive level or standards alignment. A third-grade teacher looking for all Applying-level goals in Mathematical Literacy can find them in seconds. A curriculum coordinator trying to identify which CASEL competencies are addressed in the fifth-grade program can generate that view instantly.

## Learning Progressions at Your Fingertips

The full developmental progressions for all 281 elements become navigable within the platform. Teachers can see where a student’s current skill fits in the larger developmental arc, what prerequisite skills should already be in place, and what comes next. When a student is struggling, the progression view shows exactly where to look for the gap.

## Vertical and Horizontal Alignment Views

Vertical alignment becomes a live, interactive feature—not a static spreadsheet. Educators can trace any element from PreK to graduation and see the cognitive progression, and Quality Indicators at every step. Horizontal alignment views show how the same grade level’s goals connect across domains, making cross-curricular planning concrete instead of aspirational.

## Rubrics with Criteria and Descriptors

The framework’s Quality Indicators translate directly into assessment rubrics within IMSE LAB. Each cognitive level has defined quality criteria—at the Remembering level, performance is measured against Frequent, Accurate, and On Topic. At the Analyzing level, it’s Detailed, Comprehensive, and Proportional. At the Creating level, Credible, Original, and Substantive. These aren’t generic rubric rows—they’re precisely calibrated to the developmental expectations at each level.

### Quality Indicators by Cognitive Level

- Level 1 (Remembering):** Frequent, Accurate, On Topic
- Level 2 (Understanding):** Relevant, Detailed, Organized
- Level 3 (Applying):** Practical, Relevant, Effective
- Level 4 (Analyzing):** Detailed, Comprehensive, Proportional
- Level 5 (Evaluating):** Credible, Balanced, Insightful
- Level 6 (Creating):** Credible, Original, Substantive

## Standards Crosswalk

Every learning goal’s alignment to ISTE, CASEL, C3, ACTFL, P21, NGSS, CCSS, NCAS, and SHAPE America becomes searchable. District leaders running CASEL initiatives can see exactly where social-emotional competencies live in the framework. Technology coaches working with ISTE standards can find every connection point. The platform turns what was previously a massive cross-referencing exercise into a simple search.

## Assessment and Progress Monitoring

IMSE LAB’s existing assessment infrastructure—benchmark diagnostics, progress monitoring, and reporting—extends naturally to Global Literacy Framework goals. Educators can track student progress not just on structured literacy skills, but across the full scope of competencies the framework maps. District administrators get a comprehensive view of how their programs address the whole learner, not just the academic slice.

## Why IMSE LAB Is the Right Platform

- **Established trust:** IMSE LAB already serves thousands of educators across hundreds of districts. The platform isn’t experimental—it’s proven infrastructure.
- **Teacher-designed:** Built by teachers for teachers, with an interface that prioritizes usability over feature bloat. Educators actually use it, which is rarer than it should be in edtech.

- **District-level management:** Built-in tools for districtwide implementation, monitoring, and reporting—exactly what a comprehensive framework like this requires.
- **Assessment backbone:** Existing diagnostic, progress monitoring, and reporting capabilities that can extend to Global Literacy Framework goals without building from scratch.
- **Asynchronous course delivery:** IMSE already delivers asynchronous professional development, making it a natural home for The Whole Learner course alongside the framework’s digital tools.

## The Value Proposition

So why does this matter—and why now?

### For School Districts

- A single, coherent framework that connects the nine-plus standards systems districts are already expected to implement—instead of managing them separately
- Clear developmental progressions that make vertical alignment concrete and actionable, not aspirational
- Assessment-ready rubrics with calibrated criteria at every cognitive level
- A shared professional language that enables meaningful cross-department, cross-grade collaboration
- Implementation support through a practitioner-facing course designed for real educator schedules

### For Educators

- A searchable, filterable digital tool that makes framework goals immediately usable in lesson planning
- Professional development they can actually complete—asynchronous, self-paced, and designed for skeptical adults
- Clear language for the work they’re already doing, plus visibility into what they might be missing
- Framework-aligned feedback tools that transform generic “good job” into specific, actionable growth conversations with students

## Market Context

Education is at an inflection point. The post-pandemic reckoning with student preparedness, the growing demand for whole-child approaches, and the increasing pressure to align SEL and academic standards have created real demand for exactly this kind of solution. Districts don’t want another bolt-on program—they want connective tissue that makes their existing investments work together.

The research landscape reinforces this demand. A 2024 synthesis of 115 studies on online teacher professional development found that digitized training predominantly leads to positive effects on teacher competencies and teaching practice, with participants endorsing online formats when they include structured content, collaborative activities, and support (Springer, Technology, Knowledge and Learning, 2024). Desimone and Garet (2015) confirmed that the five core features of effective PD—content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation—apply in digital environments as strongly as in face-to-face settings. The Whole Learner initiative is built on exactly this evidence base.

That’s what this initiative delivers. Not a replacement for what schools are already doing, but the organizing architecture that makes it all coherent—visible, measurable, and developmentally sequenced from preschool through graduation.

## Research Foundation

The Whole Learner initiative isn't built on intuition—it's grounded in decades of peer-reviewed research across professional development, cognitive science, curriculum design, and educational measurement. Here's a summary of the key research that informs the initiative's design.

### On Professional Development Effectiveness

- **Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017).** *Effective Teacher Professional Development*. Learning Policy Institute. A review of 35 rigorous studies identifying seven features of PD that positively link to teaching practices and student outcomes: content focus, active learning, collaboration, models of effective practice, coaching/expert support, feedback/reflection, and sustained duration.
- **Desimone, L. M. (2009).** Improving impact studies of teachers' professional development. *Educational Researcher*, 38(3), 181–199. Establishes the five core features of effective PD—content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation—as a consensus framework for PD research and design.
- **Morina, F., et al. (2025).** Effects of online teacher professional development on teacher-, classroom-, and student-level outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Computers & Education*, 228. Analysis of 102 quantitative studies finding medium effect sizes for online PD on teacher outcomes ( $g = 0.71$ ) and classroom outcomes ( $g = 0.55$ ), with PD quality characteristics as significant moderators.
- **Springer (2024).** Online teacher professional development: A research synthesis on effectiveness and evaluation. *Technology, Knowledge and Learning*. Synthesis of 115 studies confirming that online PD leads to positive effects on teacher competencies, with cognitive activation and collaboration predicting changes in practice.

### On Cognitive Progression and Learning Outcomes

- **Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (Eds.). (2001).** *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. Addison Wesley Longman. The definitive revision of Bloom's framework, shifting from nouns to active verbs and establishing the Remember–Understand–Apply–Analyze–Evaluate–Create hierarchy used throughout the Global Literacy Framework.
- **Bloom, B. S. (Ed.). (1956).** *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook I: Cognitive Domain*. David McKay Company. The foundational work establishing cognitive hierarchy as a framework for structuring educational objectives—still among the most widely used tools in education over six decades later.
- **Krathwohl, D. R. (2002).** A revision of Bloom's Taxonomy: An overview. *Theory Into Practice*, 41(4), 212–218. Explains the theoretical rationale for the revised taxonomy's two-dimensional structure (cognitive process  $\times$  knowledge type) and its practical applications for curriculum design and assessment alignment.

### On Curriculum Alignment and Student Achievement

- **Webb, N. L. (1997).** *Criteria for Alignment of Expectations and Assessments in Mathematics and Science Education*. NISE Research Monograph No. 6. Defines curriculum alignment as the degree to which standards and assessments work in conjunction to guide student learning—the foundational definition used across alignment research.

- **McGhee, M. W., & Griffith, L. K. (2001); DiBiase, W. J., Warren, J. S., & Wagner, E. P. (2001).** Multiple studies demonstrating that systematic curriculum alignment increases student achievement and reduces the impact of socioeconomic status on learning outcomes.
- **Watermeyer, R. (2011).** Research on vertical alignment confirming that sequential, building-upon curriculum design—where knowledge and skills gained in prerequisite levels prepare students for advancement—is particularly critical for subjects that are sequential and ascending in complexity.
- **CSAI/WestEd (2017).** *Standards Alignment to Curriculum and Assessment.* Establishes that vertical alignment (building across grade levels) and horizontal alignment (coherence within grade levels) are both essential for ensuring students have opportunity to access the content and skills outlined in standards.

## The Bottom Line

The challenges facing the next generation are significant—climate change, political polarization, technological disruption, mental health crises. We can't solve these problems for them. But we can prepare them. We can develop the literacies they'll need: the ability to think critically and communicate clearly, to collaborate across differences and persist through setbacks, to understand themselves and connect with others, to create and contribute and adapt.

That's what this initiative is for. The Global Literacy Framework provides the comprehensive map. The Whole Learner course builds educator capacity to read that map and use it. And the IMSE LAB integration turns the map into a daily-use navigation tool that makes the whole system searchable, trackable, and actionable at the classroom level.

The framework has been designed. The course is being built. The platform partnership is in motion. What's needed now is investment to bring these pieces together at scale—to move from an ambitious vision to a working system that serves educators and students in real schools, every day.

### Three Components, One Mission

**The Global Literacy Framework** — The comprehensive map of what comprehensive education should develop

**The Whole Learner Course** — The professional development that builds educator capacity to use the map

**IMSE LAB Integration** — The digital tool that makes the map navigable, searchable, and actionable