



Case Study:
Mayar International Schools
Amman, Jordan



Nurturing Excellence

Mayar International Schools embraces a new motto, “Think Cognia,” to build the foundation for establishing and maintaining a high-quality education

Acknowledgment

Mayar International Schools, which is part of a larger educational investment corporate called Sadeen Group, is owned by Eng. Hani Salah who embraces and spreads an ideal vision of education and caters the success of the school by all means of achievement. Eng. Hani Salah provides exceptional attention to education where this is significantly evident in his support to the school at the high school level and the American University of Malta at the higher education level. Eng. Hani Salah is the main supporter who fostered the school's engagement in Cognia's journey and gave the lead with the opportunity to describe the school's achievement and successfully sustain it.

Mayar International Schools (MIS), located in Amman, Jordan, already had 12 different accreditations when it began the accreditation process offered by Cognia™. But its General Director, Dr. Nadia Kharbat, saw the unique advantages of working with the nonprofit, nongovernmental organization. One benefit lay in Cognia's focus on continuous improvement as it accredits primary and secondary schools globally. "It's not an academic accreditation. It's about quality," she said. "How you establish a high-quality school and how to maintain that quality."



Dr. Kharbat had been the General Director of MIS, since its founding in 2011. The school, which serves more than 2,000 pre-K through grade-12 students, is recognized for the excellence of its national and international academic programs (high school students can select an international, American, or British curriculum). MIS students have ranked in the top 10 worldwide for math and physics, as well as first within the Jordanian kingdom for Arabic as a first language.

Dr. Kharbat had three other reasons for pursuing Cognia accreditation: First, when parents and students are considering schools in the area, they always ask about accreditation. “Being accredited by Cognia boosts the reputation of any school,” she said.

Second, Dr. Kharbat wanted to tap Cognia’s expertise in school quality to help maintain MIS’ record of excellence. “It’s fine to be successful, but it’s not easy to maintain this success,” she said. “The most difficult thing that we do as a team is thinking about how to maintain our success.”

Third, Dr. Kharbat felt that Cognia accreditation would be a wonderful way to mark MIS’ tenth anniversary. “It was the accreditation to celebrate our achievements,” she said.

Initially, a few members of Dr. Kharbat’s team suggested accrediting only the school’s international section or American program. But in the end, they all agreed that the process would benefit the entire school.

Reorganizing and Refining Work and People

Using a set of rigorous, research-based standards, the Cognia accreditation process reviews how well an educational institution's programs, cultural context, and community of stakeholders are working together to meet the needs of learners. A specially trained team of experts gathers firsthand evidence and information that enables them to analyze the institution's performance against the standards.

MIS already had a strong reputation for excellence, but adjusting to Cognia's standards still required a great deal of work. "We worked very hard—days and nights," Dr. Kharbat explained. "We had to reorganize our work and rethink every single detail."

For example, although each member of Dr. Kharbat's administrative team has a particular specialty, they all went through training for the entire spectrum of Cognia's standards. The standards and training cover three domains:

- **LEADERSHIP CAPACITY**—The ability to attain an institution's stated objectives, engage and involve stakeholders in meaningful and productive ways, and implement strategies that improve learner and educator performance.
- **LEARNING CAPACITY**—The characteristics of an effective learning culture, such as positive and productive teacher-learner relationships, high expectations and standards, challenging and engaging curricula, quality instruction, comprehensive support, and formative and summative assessment practices that monitor and measure learner progress and achievement.
- **RESOURCE CAPACITY**—The equitable distribution and use of resources (including support for professional learning for all staff) so the needs of all learners are adequately and effectively addressed.

Dr. Kharbat believes that the comprehensive training has helped to mold many members of her team into leaders. "Although I have different leaders for different areas, they are now all trained in the same standards. Now their knowledge is comprehensive," she said. "I'm a specialist in training, and Cognia's training courses for teachers and for the staff are really very sophisticated."

Bringing New Tools Onboard

Another major change that MIS made was replacing most of its instructional support tools with Cognia's tools. "The people who worked on these tools are really brilliant," Dr. Kharbat declared. "We have found them to be quite effective."

For example, the school now uses Cognia's classroom observation tool. MIS' previous observation tool focused on appraising teachers' performance, but Cognia's tool assesses the overall classroom environment. "It is really an added value," said Dr. Kharbat. "Cognia changed our process."

MIS also adopted Cognia's surveys, including its Inventories and Climate & Culture instruments. "I usually don't like reading surveys, but Cognia's surveys are brief and right to the point," said Dr. Kharbat. MIS also used Cognia's Back-to-School Readiness Surveys in October 2020 and its Remote Learning Surveys between December 2020 and February 2021. The staff has even created a custom alumni survey through Cognia.

Dr. Kharbat reported that students love the new surveys. "They have the chance to do it in their mother tongue, Arabic, or to do it in the English language," she said.

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Pushing through the trials of the pandemic

During MIS' accreditation process, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the school to close its physical campus and move fully online. While MIS already had an online school, not being able to regularly meet in person made implementing the improvements harder for the staff. "People are not there with you. They are all behind their screens. So, it wasn't easy," said Dr. Kharbat. "And the Cognia standards are very high."

Over 2020, there were almost 300,000 cases of COVID-19 in Jordan. And Dr. Kharbat was one of them. "Ten days before our inspection, I had coronavirus," she said. "And the first day I got back to school was our inspection with Cognia."

A “Think Cognia” mindset and other rewards

Despite the hard work and the complications of the pandemic, Dr. Kharbat extolled her experience with Cognia. “I love Cognia,” she declared. “I feel that this was one of the most important achievements for the school and for me as an administrator, as well.”

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Cognia’s processes have strengthened the MIS team’s growth mindset. In fact, staff members have a new unofficial motto: Think Cognia. “Now, when we go through any dilemma or any kind of discussion, we just start saying ‘Think Cognia.’ It is about thinking together in a different way,” Dr. Kharbat said.

Dr. Kharbat recounted that one team member said, “We are really on track, but Cognia helps us to keep on track much more confidently.” Another said, “Guiding generations is part of our job, and Cognia helped us to guide ourselves so we’re able to guide this generation.” Yet another team member simply stated, “Cognia nurtures our excellence.”

Dr. Kharbat also appreciated that Cognia’s accreditation process involved researching and documenting MIS’ past accomplishments. “Sometimes you don’t see what you’ve done. You just see that you’re struggling with different problems and challenges,” she said. “Cognia helped us to see our achievements.” In addition, being able to cite those successes boosted the school’s credibility with parents and students.

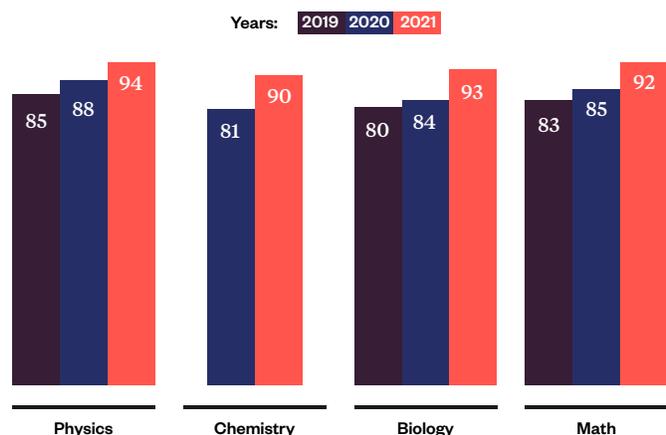
Maintaining and increasing success

Throughout 2020 and 2021, the MIS team used Cognia’s Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool® (eleot®) to evaluate aspects of instruction that are proven to have positive effects on student learning. The initial eleot scores showed MIS to be above average for equitable learning, high expectations for students, supportive learning, active learning, progress monitoring, and well-managed learning. Implementing Cognia’s standards took MIS instruction to a new level as evidenced by the increased student test scores in the American program from 2019–2021: across science and math content areas, the average score increased 10 percentage points from the low 80%’s to above a remarkable 90%. This increase reflects the student and staff’s commitment to learning and the growth mindset brought about in the accreditation process.

In addition, the impressively high quality of instruction has resulted in high levels of engagement among MIS students. According to Cognia’s student engagement survey, about 81% of students have a deep personal investment in their own learning. The survey also found that 83% of students expressed both a love for the school and a sense of belonging. A similar percentage had a high desire to attend classes as well as participate in school activities.

After overcoming hurdles, including the COVID-19 pandemic, to reach those new levels of success, Dr. Kharbat is looking to the future with assurance. “I can say with all confidence that Cognia helps the school, our teachers, and our students to achieve success,” she said. “We have a very strong foundation now, and whenever we face a challenge, we can rely on that strong foundation.”

Average of Subject Test Scores in the American Program



About Cognia

Cognia is a global nonprofit that has the knowledge to help schools improve. Cognia offers accreditation and certification, assessment, professional learning, and improvement services. The result of the merger of AdvancED and Measured Progress, Cognia was formed to bridge the gap between school evaluation and student assessment. We are the largest education improvement organization in the world and an undeniable force for enhancing schools, engaging students, and driving better outcomes for all. In 2020, the entities that came together to form Cognia marked 125 years of service to education.

Find out more at cognia.org.





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