Atlas

User Guide

Building Institutional Memory with Atlas

With meeting templates, departmental resource pages, and personalized dashboards, the American International School in Kuwait (AISK) turned Atlas into a hub for all teachers' needs—curricular and beyond. In this guide, walk through AISK's documentation process for storing its collective memories and how this has a direct impact on the way school faculty engages with that information.

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When they began preparing for a reaccreditation review in 2013, AISK reflected on their then current school process by considering these questions:

- To what extent is our teaching staff involved in our school-wide decision-making process?
- How does our documentation process affect the ways in which our staff engages with institutional memory?
- How do we hold our team accountable for following through on meeting action items?
- How do we ensure that we repeat what works and adjust what doesn't?
- Are we providing adequate knowledge transfers for new hires?
- How accessible are our school-wide documents, resources, and best practice reports?

Although the school had a strong decision making-process in place, it lacked transparency and collaboration. The process also included a number of outdated resources, including hard-copy reports stored in file cabinets and old policy handbooks kept in various divisional offices.

AISK realized that their process was not operationally efficient. Using an Excellence by Design model, AISK created a future-focused goal: By 2020, demonstrate a more collaborative and transparent process for developing, implementing, communicating, and monitoring organizational and long-range strategic plans.

AISK determined that an improved strategic planning process would only come with an improved documentation system. In this guide, read three steps AISK took to build institutional memory – a collection of the lessons, units, encouraging moments, success stories, faculty meetings, and the shared experiences of those who work hard each day to meet the needs of students – in their Atlas site.

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1. Move Beyond Courses

Creating courses for different departmental and administrative groups will give Atlas users easy access to shared material. With a "course" built for each, schools can centralize material with "units" that house meetings minutes, shared resources, helpful curriculum examples, and more. AISK uses a creative method for organizing these "courses." Take a look at the various school types, schools, and map types AISK uses to organize its administrative courses.

One of these administrative templates is used for what AISK calls "Action Notes." All AISK teams use a streamlined template to document what was presented at meetings, and how action will be taken to address each agenda item.

With this streamlined documentation policy, translating meetings into action has become AISK common practice.

AIS Action Notes	
AIS Mission AIS Kuwait inspires students to become critical thinkers and contributing world citizens through rigor and balance in a nurturing educational environment.	
Meeting Date, Time, and Location	Pre-Meeting Preparation Resources
Attendance Roles (Chair, Recorder, Timer)	Members Present
Agenda Items	Action(s)
IB/MSA Standard	
Next Meeting Specifics	

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2. Invite People to the Conversation

When a school uses Atlas as a platform for school-wide strategic planning conversations, lowercase administrative teams have reason to expand Atlas usage to teaching assistants, business staff, and operational staff. By expanding the scope of Atlas, schools encourage new and old users to more frequently access the system in order to gain familiarity with its many benefits.

At AISK, Atlas users can access meeting agendas, see which decisions were made, and view who is responsible for carrying out different tasks. With its Administrative Council Reports, AISK created a way for staff members to stay abreast of significant changes in the school.

This sample report outlines the Administrative Council plans to amend a meeting process. Though the report is only editable by members of a core administrative team, it is viewable on Atlas by all members of the school faculty and staff. Through Atlas, AISK personnel can leave notes and engage in discussion about the plan. By giving voice to each member of its community, the AISK administration encourages communication within these groups to share ideas, best practices, and get their questions answered.

3. Rejuvenate and Streamline Your Units

Update your units to capture information that will be helpful for your school's growth and curricular process moving forward. Examples might include revising the checkable options in checkbox categories to reflect new school goals and objectives or adding a new free text box to gain teacher reflections on academic units, departmental processes, or new policies. Encourage teachers to follow a "Style Guide" to ensure that the data going into Atlas is uniform across courses and units.

Consider implementing a new method for titling units that share a component in common. For Meeting Minutes, AISK follows a numbering system to title each with the date on which it occurred. This Grade 8 Team Meeting course from AISK is a great example of uniform unit titling, and creative use of the curriculum map to document department meetings.
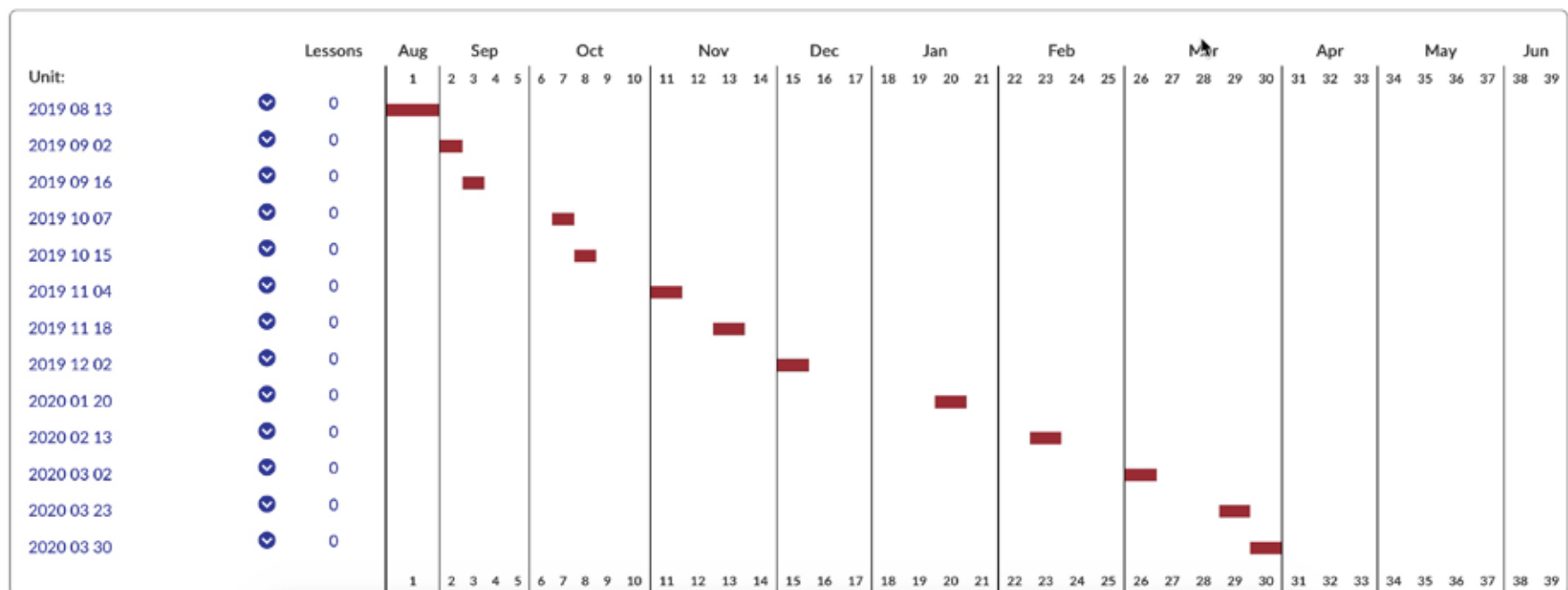
Finally, take advantage of the Attachment capabilities of Atlas by attaching files from your computer, Google Drive, and links from the internet. Gone are the days when important resources could be found only by visiting various departmental offices and searching through file cabinets. When stored in one place, teachers will have no trouble accessing material from various individuals.

Through this AIS Tech Integration Resources course, any staff member with Atlas access can navigate to this page and take advantage of the many links and attachments related to technology integration in the classroom.

4. Provide Professional Development

In order to create a sustainable process for documenting institutional memory, schools need a supportive administrative team. Conversations around strategic planning and institutional memory are only possible when everyone speaks a common language. For AISK, that language was Atlas. Through workshopping with the Atlas team, AISK was able to provide PD to ensure that all members of the faculty and staff were fluent.

This professional development work is valuable for returning Atlas users and new users alike. In addition to PD sessions on deepening skills in Atlas, school administration can put in place easy onboarding processes for introducing new hires into the system. One way that AISK does this is by pushing custom dashboards to new users' systems. New PYP teachers receive a dashboard with quick links to PYP resources, Units of Inquiry, and departmental meeting notes. New administrators receive a dashboard with helpful reports and links to the Administrative Council shared course. In any school, but especially for international schools with high turnover rates, plans and processes must be documented to ensure that they "endure beyond the tenure of their members." You can learn about Faria's Professional Development offerings at fariaedu.com/pd.

We encourage all of our partner schools to think about ways in which you could use Atlas to support lowercase institutional memory moving forward!