In 2007, Lana Khalaf placed a $75 advertisement on an online message board. She was looking for international teachers who would be willing to travel to Nablus, Palestine, to educate local students at a brand new school.

At the time, the region was reeling from a long period of political turmoil and instability. The city was isolated, and families struggled to find ways to educate their children. The nonprofit Future Pioneers Society had a goal: to bring a high-caliber, international school to the city. Khalaf would serve as Head of School.

She submitted the ad, and crossed her fingers. The next morning, she had 65 applicants.

"I was so impressed and inspired that people from around the world were following what was happening in our region and believed in the importance of educating Palestinians," Khalaf said.

It's this belief in the universal power of education that launched Pioneers School nearly 15 years ago and keeps it successful today. What began as a K–3 school with 90 students learning in borrowed building space is now a K-12 school accredited by the New England Association of Colleges and Schools (NEASC) where 680 students study English literacy, Arabic fluency, Islamic studies, mathematics, and science in a brand-new facility.

"While fancy buildings and nice facilities are important, our journey shows that what's more important is what happens in the classroom," said Khalaf.

It wasn't an easy path forward. From being misplaced every few years, to overcoming local mistrust in the international curriculum, to foreign staff being barred from entering the country, the school faced every obstacle. Yet despite the struggles, Pioneers School pressed on, developing a curriculum that both honors local roots and religion and exposes students to a bilingual, global perspective. "We spend every summer in high anticipation," said Khalaf. "But then every year, when we watch our students graduate with full scholarships to schools around the world, we know it's worth every effort."

In an area where education and daily life continue to be interrupted by severe unrest, Pioneers School stands strong as a beacon of stability, hope, and a broader vision of the future for the students and families of Nablus.
International independent schools are in great need of professional support, education, and training. Seeing this, The Enrollment Management Association (EMA) and the Educational Collaborative for International Schools (ECIS) have joined forces. For the first time in its history, EMA extended its exhaustive range of professional development services and resources to another organization. ECIS’s 400+ international member schools can now access EMA’s diverse offerings, including webinars, podcasts, discussion groups, courses, research, and EMA’s highly regarded annual conference.

ECIS Executive Director Kam Chohan shares, “This partnership is of great importance to ECIS in helping us to support our member schools through the fragile post-COVID world. Fierce competition for pupils is expected, and we want to equip our community with the expertise required by admissions and enrollment teams to secure a strong and sustainable future for all ECIS schools.”

“This agreement is an important step for both our organizations, allowing two of the most important professional secondary school groups to evolve through knowledgeable discussions, training, and shared insights,” said Executive Director and CEO Heather Hoerle. “Schools will be able to create and build rewarding networks while training and learning through EMA’s purposeful programs.”

Learn more about Pioneers School at: www.pioneers.ps

Lana Khalaf is the Principal of Pioneers Baccalaureate School, a private, nonprofit bilingual school in Nablus, Palestine. Under her leadership, Pioneers Baccalaureate School grew from an initial 90 students to over 450 students in 2014–2015 and became the first school in Nablus to offer the American SAT model.