

Japanese Government's Priorities for Education

—Focusing on Relationships in School-Community Partnerships—

Shinjiro KOZUMA

1. Introduction

This short paper will show how major progresses made in educational reforms in Japan have been tackled during this decade.¹ Especially it will focus on the tendencies concerning relationships in school-community partnerships in local level.

Main agendas of today's educational reforms in Japan are as follows:

- (1) Improvement of academic capabilities
- (2) Fostering spiritual wealth
- (3) Strengthening the organization and management systems of boards of education and schools
- (4) Improving educational functions of the family and of the community
- (5) Modality of higher education corresponding to a new era
- (6) Modality of education corresponding to the increasing number of foreign children
- (7) Modality of teachers corresponding to the future era and enhancing educational environments.

According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), it has determined the Courses of Study as broad standards for all schools, from kindergarten through upper secondary schools, to organize their programs in order to ensure a fixed standard of education throughout the country.² The Courses of Study for elementary and lower secondary schools were revised in March 2016 and those for upper secondary schools and schools for special needs education, in March 217. In addition, MEXT set some important aims those are for individual children to be able to

improve their motivation to learn and develop academic abilities, while developing rich minds and healthy bodies. It concluded in the introduction of new subject "Moral Education".

Besides reforming contents of school education, new system of board of education has been introduced from 2016. Under these reforms, boards of education have been set in each prefecture and municipals and each board come to set education conference including governor selected by election.

Mentioned above, there are various important issues surrounding education in Japan. From other viewpoints, there are four basic policy directions of the educational administration in Japan. These are ① Developing social competencies for survival ② Developing human resources for a brighter future ③ Building safety nets for learning ④ Building bonds and establishing vibrant communities.

As this paper has a space constraint, it will focus on the for the agenda "Improving educational functions of the family and of the community".

2. The Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education (Cabinet Decision on June 14, 2013)

Before touching on the relationships between schools and community, governmental policies concerning these relationships have to be referred. MEXT has set The Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education in 2013. In this plan, many agendas were pointed as below.

- A virtuous circle where society nurtures people, and

¹ This paper is based on the presentation for "Putting postgraduate research to work in educational leadership for social change", A workshop in three parts, The British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society (BELMAS) 2019, 13rd, July, Titled 'Japanese Government's priorities for education —Focusing on Relationships in School-Community Partnerships—', Presenters are Shinjiro KOZUMA (Fukuoka Univ.) Midori UEDA (National Institute for Educational Policy Research) Nozomu TAKAHASHI (Gumma Univ.) Shota TERUYA (Ibaraki Univ.).

² <http://www.mext.go.jp/en/policy/education/elsec/title02/detail02/1373859.htm> (2019/8/21)

people create society – Enhancing society-wide educational abilities such as forming social and networks to gather various people and collaborate with each other through learning. Establishing environments for social participation in people’s own initiative and supporting each other.

- As achievement target, the necessity for establishment of vibrant communities through support and cooperation has been pointed out. Examples of Achievement Indicators are as follows:

- Building a system of organizational coordination and act in concert within administrative office, schools and communities in all school districts.

- Transitioning 10% of all public elementary and lower secondary schools (approximately 3000 schools) to community schools (School Management Council System)

- Act on the Organization and Operation of Local Educational Administration (2017): prescription of duty and effort of setting School Management Council

3. System of school management council (Community Schools)

According to MEXT, improving school management based upon school evaluations and securing enough time for teachers to spend with children, alongside strengthening trust amongst guardians, community members, and schools are key to improving the school

environment and raising educational standards. Hence, MEXT has been promoting school management support policies, such as Community Schools (schools which have school management councils), school evaluation, and reduced paperwork.³

The outline and organization of school management council are regulated by Article 47 of the Act on the Organization and Operation of Local Educational Administration.

Relating to the above, The Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education (2013) declared in ‘Establishment of environments for the Four Basic Policy Directions’ that along with harnessing the views and strengths of the community in school administration, schools shall be positioned as strongholds of communication invigoration. By having schools themselves decide that which is desired by community residents and guardians, and by further ensuring political neutrality along with sustainability and stability, with continued attention to the responsibility of the nation for equal opportunity in nationwide education and maintaining and improving educational standards, authority shall be delegated to proximal authority. First, through further aims to spread and promote community schools (School Management Council System), the government will promote efforts to create schools within their communities and revitalize the boards of education.⁴

MEXT mount an effort to establish an organiza-

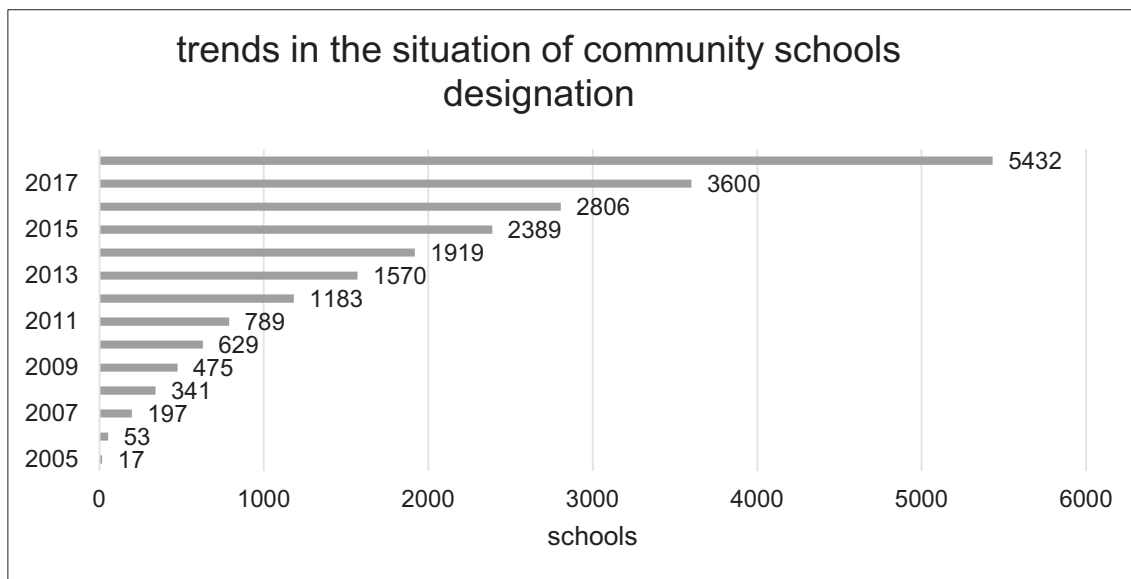


Fig. 1 trends of increasing number of community school

³ School Management Support Division, Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau in MEXT <http://www.mext.go.jp/en/policy/education/elsec/title02/detail02/1373863.htm> (2019/8/24)

⁴ <http://www.mext.go.jp/en/policy/education/lawandplan/title01/detail01/sdetail01/1373804.htm> (2019/8/29)

school management council

the function of school management council

- approval of fundamental plan of school management
- request for school management
- request for teacher personnel



the meeting of school management council

For enhancing the function and role of school management council

- the discussion about
- ✓ school administration and management for dealing with the challenges of school
- ✓ support for improving student achievement

Member (within 20 people)

- community people
- parents (e.g. PTA)
- local welfare officer/child welfare volunteer
- school staff (e.g. principal and deputy principal)
- administrative officer (2 people)
- people who have an academic background

Fig. 2 the Function of school management council

tional administrative system for schools, and to improve school administration based on promoting school evaluation and its results. Concerning the improvement of educational standards, in order to improve educational standards, it is said that examining educational outcomes is essential, and making improvements consistently must be based on the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Action) cycle. To do this, MEXT went forward school evaluations, especially effective self-evaluations by schools and external evaluations by guardians, and consider trial third-party evaluations of schools by conducting the trial evaluation.

The functions of school management council are ① approval of fundamental plan of school management, ② request for school management, ③ request for teacher personnel. The council consists of within 20 people, these are, community people, parents(e.g. PTA),local welfare officer/child welfare volunteer, school staff(e.g. principal and deputy principal, administrative officer(2 people)and people who have an academic background. For enhancing the function and role of school management council, they usually discuss the school administration and management for dealing with the challenges of school and support for improving student achievement.

As will become apparent below, many examples have been apparent these days.

4. Examination Cases : Relationships in School-Community Partnerships in Kasuga-city, Japan

According to the 2015 Census, total population of Kasuga city is 110,743 people. Kasuga city is located in

Fukuoka Prefecture and close to the south area of Fukuoka city. The population density is 7,826 people / square kilometer, under Fukuoka Prefecture is the most densely populated region.

Kasuga method has been introduced this decade. Kasuga method is namely an actual working organization, and school management councils are divided in two types, subcommittee style and support committee style. Both styles aim at taking shape of various support for schools from community.

Fig.3 gives an image of interactive communication between schools and parents, community. In Kasuga city, Board of Education, the Mayor of the city and the department have been keeping a relationship of cooperating with each other this decade. And the structure of community school for 3 schools were introduced in 2005, then all 17 schools come to set school management councils in 2010. Besides these introduction of systems, superintendent of education started 'talking with teachers and parents' at each school. Through these efforts for improvement of work efficiency, educational administration has been deeply changed.

Specifically, parents and community often provide various activities for schools, for example, safety education, support staff in classroom, anti-crime patrol around schools, reading aloud to students, greetings in the morning at the gate of school and so on. On the other hand, schools offer various contributions to parents and community. For example, support for summer festival held by community, support for the organization for the aged, participation for community events and so on. And as

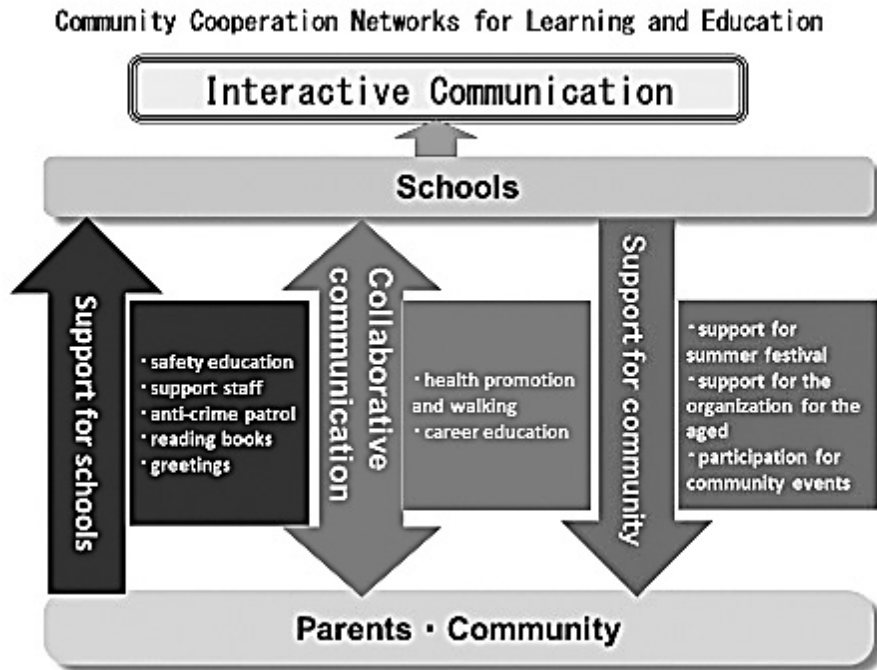


Fig. 3 an image of the structure of community school in Kasuga city⁵



Fig. 4 'learning together' outside the curriculum

collaborative communication, health promotion and walking, career education are dealt with each other.

Above all, the effort for 'learning together' outside the curriculum has been tackled recently, inhabitants

and parents joined various trials such as point rating, traffic safety instructions, harvest, weeding, instruction after school, and so on, On the other hand, students would join summer festivals held by community, help for

⁵ PowerPoint slides in this paper are provided from the board of education of Kasuga city. Thanks to Kasuga city, I could arrange these slides for presenting at BELMAS on 13rd 2019 in Hinckley, England.

tent construction, so the satisfactory relationships have been built nowadays. (see Fig.4)

Fig.5 and 6 shows that how the board of education understand the real situation about new curriculum connected community. Board of education of Kasuga city arranged 4 viewpoints concerning making good use of social capitals, that is to say various experiment of parents and inhabitants.

In the area of 'using community' and 'learning community', especially in the integrated learning period, some inhabitants are invited to school and asked to have

a few periods. In such periods, parents usually teach how to use household tools such as sewing machine. Old residents often talk to students about old days of schools and give them boastful talks. The contents of talks are tradition, nature and culture of community where students live. These periods have good reputation amongst students and teachers.

Furthermore, usually in the second period, 3rd grade junior high school students will select their courses after graduating school. In the selecting course meeting at school, their parents also attend for full ap-

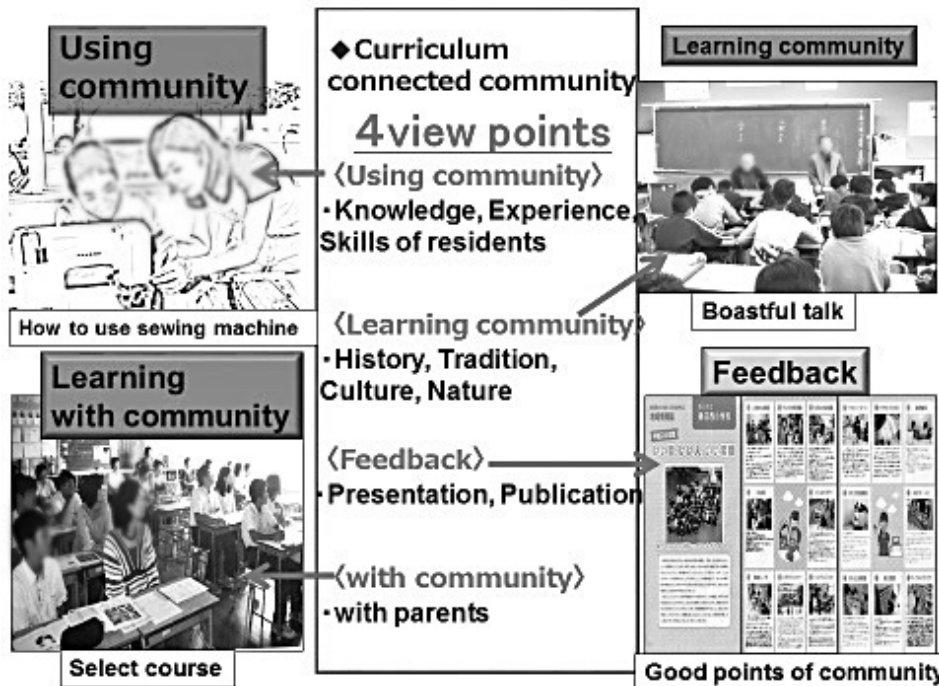


Fig. 5 4 viewpoints of new curriculum connected community

collaborative curriculum with school community

- ① review of school curriculum:
review of curriculum contents and teaching way in terms of educational effect
- ② development of school curriculum:
development of curriculum based on and learned with community



Fig. 6 collaborative curriculum with school community

prehension. After such events and efforts schools usually express students' gratitude for parents and community though some leaflets those are distributed regularly to parents and community centers located in Kasuga city.

Alongside these practices in each school, in addition in the integrated learning period, to develop school curriculum school usually rethink the partnerships with community. As mentioned above, it is a matter of course that inhabitants join in the integrated learning period. Old members of community will instruct students about 'go' or 'shogi', outdoor activities, making traditional products (such as 'shimenawa'), making vegetables and so on, Parents will take part in the class of riding bicycle and to ensure safety at school excursion. These support from community and parents are very helpful for school activities, and at present, they are important and necessary in Kasuga city.

5. Conclusion

In summarizing the contents mentioned above, I will refer other pilot program examined in Kasuga city. That is an example of 'Collaboration of Primary and Secondary schools'. In the recent trend of education in Japan, more collaboration between the primary and secondary schools, students, teachers and headteachers attract rising attention. Teachers from primary and secondary have all got their own ideas but few have experi-

ence of seeing each other in practice.⁶

In Japan, so-called 'Chu 1 Gap' has been crucial problems these days, so many schools and municipalities started to launch integrated education or cooperation between elementary and junior high schools so as not to annoy some difficulties when they move from elementary school to junior high school. So it is expected to achieve the good results of integrated education in elementary and junior high schools.

According to views of MEXT, by implementing elementary and junior high school collaboration and integrated education, elementary and junior high school teachers should recognize their role in the overall educational activities after understanding the educational activities of the nine years of compulsory education, ensuring the systematicity of nine years, and amending the Basic Law of Education in 2006. It is possible to develop the qualities, abilities, attitudes, etc. set forth in the purpose, goals, and attitudes set forth in the purpose and goal of compulsory education newly stipulated in the revision of the School Education Law in 2008, which is a basic purpose common to all elementary and junior high school collaboration and integrated education.⁷

From the context of systematicity of nine years, Fig.7 and 8 shows that collaboration of primary and secondary schools in Kasuga city. Not only sharing information of students, it should be specially mentioned that junior high school students often support for learning of elementary school pupils. Also in Kasugaminami junior



Fig. 7 examples of collaboration of primary and secondary schools

⁶ As well as in England, these trends have been found elsewhere. <https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2013/may/08/collaboration-primary-secondary-schools-working-together> (2019.8.28)

⁷ Ibid,

○ the relationship with other Community Cooperation Networks for Learning and Education

e.g. activities of after school class



cooking (Sugu Primary)



storytelling (Kasuga Primary)

introduction and invitation of each activity
giving the opportunity of activity



Table tennis (Kasugabaru Primary)



poem card game
(Kasugaminami Primary)

Fig. 8 other examples of the relationship with Community Cooperation Networks for Learning and Education

high school, during two days school excursion of 2nd grade students, 6th grade primary students come to the vacant classrooms and have classes. It is great experience for them and smooth transition from primary to secondary schools will be expected.

Because of frequent occurrences natural disasters, risk and crisis management of schools are strongly requested nowadays, so evacuation drills are necessary for schools (especially junior high school district). Besides these collaboration, greetings in the morning at the gate of school have been common practice for years, the trend of expanding opportunities for extra-curricular ac-

tivities (ball game, athletics clubs, summing, culture and so on) for elementary students after school in the ground of junior high school.

As stated above, relationships in School-Community Partnerships has been common and had rich experiences at local level. These practices and trials are expected to become popular throughout Japan, then as MEXT emphasizes the importance of 'Improving educational functions of the family and of the community', school activities and air of students are also expected to change and improve in near future.