

Japanese Policy for After-School Programs: Education through School-Community Collaborations

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Introduction

A school-community partnership is being studied that brings beneficial outcomes for both students and the community (Gouëdard, 2018). A school-community partnership is an important common effort for future educational policy and practices around the world. This article reports on policies supported by the Japanese government for after-school programs which emphasize partnerships between schools and communities.

Promoting education through collaboration between schools and communities has been a central theme of the educational policy and reform in Japan since 2006, when the Education Basic Law was amended. This is a crucial theme not only for extended education, such as after-school programs, but also for regular classes in primary and secondary education. Such efforts in Japan are regarded as educational reforms to build school-community partnerships (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, MEXT, 2018a). There are four main objectives of this partnership: 1) to promote a curriculum open to society, 2) to assist students to learn actively, 3) to strengthen both schools and the community, and 4) to create a hub for multiple services and activities. Japanese after-school policy is regarded as one way to achieve partnerships between schools and their local communities.

The new plan for after-school programs in Japan

Since 2007, the Japanese after-school policy has been promoted in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare: MHLW and MEXT. “The New General After-School Children’s Plan,” presented in September 2018, is a revised national plan for after-school policy during 2019-2023 fiscal years.

The plan has set some concrete goals for after-school programs. In the plan, there are four proposed national targets. The first is to increase the number of children participating in After-school Children’s Clubs Project (AS Clubs Project)¹ from 1.22 million to 1.5 mil-

1 AS Clubs Project is an after-school program under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW).

lion. The second is that all elementary schools² should provide after-school programs, in cooperation with AS Clubs Project and the After-School Classes for Children Project (AS Classes Project)³. The third goal is that more than 10,000 schools should integrate the implementation of the AS Clubs Project and the AS Classes Project. This means that the children in both projects can participate in the same program activities together. The fourth national target is that, in these newly developed integrated projects, school facilities should be fully utilized, and 80% of the newly launched AS Clubs Project should be implemented at elementary schools' premises (MEXT 2018c).

In the new plan, the government emphasizes after-school support that makes much better use of school facilities. In general, each public as well as private primary and secondary school in Japan has a variety of educational facilities, including a playground, a gymnasium, an outdoor pool, a cooking room, and a science laboratory. The notice "school facilities should be used thoroughly" means that the government calls for utilizing these facilities not only for regular classes, but also for after-school programs.

It should also be noted that additional measures for children who need special consideration, including those with disabilities or who experience abuse or bullying, are considered important. Facilitating cooperation between various private services, such as cram schools (specialized schools for test preparations), English conversation schools, and piano or dance lessons, with after-school programs is also considered important. In order to respond to such diverse needs and to foster the next generation to recreate the community itself, collaboration between schools and the community is considered indispensable in Japan.

The role of the Board of Education

To promote education through school-community collaborations, the cooperative activities as well as the roles of the administrative jurisdiction and municipal Board of Education are specified in the Social Education Law that was amended in March 2017.

The cooperative activities between schools and the community is named "Community Cooperation Activities for Learning and Education" (CCALE). It is described as follows: "CCALE are activities that involve the participation of a wide range of residents, such as elderly people in the community, adults, students, parents, parent-teacher associations (PTAs), non-profit organizations (NPOs), private companies, other organizations and institutions. In various activities schools and local communities cooperate to support children's learning and growth throughout the region, as well as in 'creating a community centered on schools'" (MEXT, 2018d).

The Board of Education is expected to play a leading role in developing the system in each region. It is specified in the law that the Board of Education is responsible for developing cooperative systems with communities and schools, and for taking measures to spread awareness of these activities (Article 5 of Social Education Law). It is also specified that the

2 There are 19,892 elementary schools in Japan (MEXT 2018b).

3 AS Classes Project is an after-school program under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT)

Board of Education has the authority to designate those who serve to connect the communities with schools as “coordinators of CCALE” (Article 9 of Social Education Law).

In the Japanese context, social education is defined in the Social Education Law as follows; “It refers to systematic educational activities including physical education and recreational activities that are mainly conducted with children, youth, and adults, but it does not cover educational activities conducted as school curriculums” (Article 2 of Social Education Law). The Social Education administration covers learning activities for people of all ages. Social educational facilities include libraries, museums, and other lifelong learning centers, with extracurricular activities for children. In this sense, after-school support for children is often undertaken by the jurisdiction of the Board of Education, within the Social Education or Lifelong Learning Section.

To further promote CCALE, activity guidelines, handbooks for coordinators, and a reference guide for commissioning coordinators for the Board of Education are published (MEXT 2018d, 2018e, 2018f, 2018g). The government provides these documents on their website as well, as it aims to promote the understanding and dissemination of the system nationwide.

The government states that concrete roles of the Board of Education are: to secure and commission coordinators of CCALE; to conduct training programs to improve the management skills of principals in community schools (described in the next section); to implement workshops for school management council members, school faculty, staff, and CCALE coordinators; and to secure expenses for various projects to promote CCALE (MEXT 2018e).

Main mechanisms for achieving the school-community partnerships

Main mechanisms for promoting education through school-community collaborations are community schools and the Community Cooperation Network for Learning and Education (CCNLE). Community schools are schools that have adopted the School Management Council system. Council members are residents, parents or guardians, and the coordinator of CCALE, newly appointed by the Administrative Law on Local education in 2017. Specifically, council duties include: 1) approving basic principles of school management created by the school principal, 2) giving opinions on school management to the Board of Education or to the principal, 3) giving opinions on teacher appointments, and 4) promoting cooperation between schools and communities (MEXT, 2017). As of April 2018, there are 5,432 community schools established nationwide, with further increase expected in the future (MEXT, 2018h).

CCNLE is a network formed by the participation of a wide range of residents, organizations, and community partners. The coordinator of CCALE is expected to play a central role in its operation. According to 2017 statistics, there are 5,168 CCNLEs established in elementary and junior high schools nationwide (MEXT, 2018i). The government aims to establish CCNLE in all elementary and junior high schools⁴.

4 There are 30,162 elementary and junior high schools in Japan (MEXT 2018b).

Key personnel for achieving the school-community partnerships

In order to promote education through collaboration between schools and the community, human resources are needed. The author believe the following three types of personnel are key to promoting the CCALE: coordinator of CCALE, community liaison school staff, and the Social Education Director.

As previously mentioned, coordinators of CCALE are expected to play a central role in CCNLE. The role of coordinator is diverse and the government presents its main objectives as follows: 1) planning CCALE according to the actual conditions of the region and schools; 2) coordinating with school staff, local residents, and other stakeholders such as companies and organizations; 3) recruiting and securing regional volunteers; 4) administrative processing and expense processing of CCNLE; 5) providing information and advice to local residents; and 6) promoting activities of local residents. As the responsibilities of the coordinator are significant, the government suggests that the Board of Education may assign multiple coordinators to one region to share roles, and to work as a team to promote CCALE (MEXT 2018f).

The second category of key personnel are community liaison school staff, who represent a general opening for CCALE at schools. In many cases, certain teachers or office staff perform the role of the community liaison school staff. The government provides examples of potential roles for the community liaison school staff as follows: 1) to contact and coordinate with the Board of Education, and to coordinate, within and between, schools and districts; 2) to understand and support the needs of school staff; 3) to plan and implement training programs for community cooperation in schools; and 4) to coordinate the management and operational activities undertaken by school management councils (MEXT 2018f). The government is considering that the community liaison school staff also be specified by law, but currently it is not⁵.

The third category of key personnel is the Social Education Director, an educational specialist stipulated in the Social Education Law since 1954, who is mainly placed at the prefectural and municipal Board of Education and promotes social education in the region. The training curriculum to acquire the qualification of Social Education Director was revised in February 2018, by order of the Ministry, and will start in 2020. In the new curriculum, “lifelong learning support theory” and “social education management theory” are added. The government states the reason for the curriculum revision as follows; “The Social Education Director is expected to play a core role in promoting social education and community development, by supporting learning activities of local residents by cooperating with diverse agents such as NPOs, enterprises, etc. The curriculum is revised to train the fundamental qualities and abilities that are needed for doing such missions of Social Education Director” (MEXT 2018j).

It is important for the Social Education Director to be trained in coordinating between different stakeholders, such as local residents, companies, and organizations in the community, and in facilitating learners’ activities. According to 2015 statistics, there are 2,047 So-

5 The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has stated on the website that it is considering legally stipulating community liaison school staff.

cial Education Directors nationwide. The government aims to expand both the number of Social Education Directors, as well as to improve their abilities.

Those who learn the new curriculum and acquire the qualifications will also earn the professional title of “Social Education Coordinator: tentative name (shakai kyōiku shi).” This ministerial ordinance aims to increase personnel with such expertise not only with regard to the staff employed within the Board of Education, but also with regard to those who work as CCNLE coordinators and NPO staff.

Future direction and challenges

The policy of promoting after-school collaborations between schools and communities has been underway since 2009 in Japan. At present, reform of primary education is being established, with the further promotion of after-school policies in secondary education expected.

There are some challenges the policy needs to focus on in the future (Bae & Kanefuji, 2018). One of the biggest issues is regional disparity. The degree of promotion of CCALE, CCNLE and community schools differs, depending on the region. It is also uncertain whether the training and arrangement of coordinators of CCALE and Social Education Directors will progress smoothly or not.

The discretionary power given to the principal of a Japanese school is less than that afforded to the principal of a western school. On the other hand, the Board of Education has the right to distribute the budget to each school and the right to recruit and reassign teachers in public schools. It is necessary to determine whether such mechanisms work as positive factors, or not, for promoting school-community partnerships, and what changes and effects there will be to Japanese education.

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