

Educational Administration in Japan

This article presents an overview of the development of educational administration in Japan since the introduction of a modern education system, and shows how the system was put in place and how it has changed over time. Japan is said to have a centrally controlled educational administrative system, but in fact Japan had established a local educational administration structure even before World War II, with the division of responsibility arranged essentially on the basis that compulsory education was a municipal responsibility, secondary education was a prefectural responsibility, and higher education was a national responsibility. Japan had already established a fairly efficient education administration system in the prewar era. In the postwar era, the democratization and decentralization of education was identified as a core issue of educational reform. The central pillars were the reduction of the authority of the Ministry of Education and the introduction of a local educational administration structure that took the U.S. system of boards of education as its model. The board of education system has been adapted and modified to Japanese conditions. Finally, the article touches on the current structure of educational administration and on reform issues.

1. Introducing and establishing a structure of educational administration

In the Edo era, there was no nationwide school system, so consequently there was no educational administration organization. Public schools existed for youngsters of the samurai class, but they were few in number, with only 1 or 2 schools in each fief (there were about 250 fiefs), and administering them was a easy task. In the case of private academies or that of “terakoya” (popular learning houses), which catered to commoners, any system of public administration or control was completely lacking. It was in the latter part of the 19th century, following the Meiji Restoration, when a nationwide school system was introduced on the basis of models from Western countries. For the first time, an educational administration structure was also established. The Department of Education was established in 1871 as the central government body in charge of educational administration.

In the Education System Order of 1872, the first educational law in the modern period, France was taken as the model for the organization of educational administration. The whole country was divided into school districts (university districts, middle school districts, and elementary school districts); each school district was the basic area for the establishment of schools and was expected to become the standard unit of educational administration. A school district was not conterminous with general administrative districts at the prefectural, municipal or village level, but was a unit specially designated for the purpose of educational administration. However, the Education System Order was not in fact exactly implemented in the way it was conceived.

In 1878, the government introduced new laws and regulations concerning local governments,

thereby clarifying the authority and functions of the prefecture, the county (gun), and the municipality (ward, town and village). In 1879, the Education System Order was abolished, and in its place, the Education Order was promulgated. Through this Order, a new concept for a system of educational administration was realized. The system of school districts was abolished, and the units of educational administration were unified with the units of general local administration. The management of elementary education was made the responsibility of municipalities, and that of secondary education the responsibility of prefectures.

Following criticism that the Education System Order had been too uniform, the new direction was that education should be left to local discretion. The local educational administration would be the responsibility of educational committee members directly elected by town or village residents. This system of educational committee members is said to have been modeled on the American system of boards of education. However, criticisms were made to the effect that the Education Order gave too much freedom of action to local community officials, with the result that it was revised only one year after it was issued. The Revised Education Order of 1880 once again expanded the authority of the Department of Education. In addition, the formula whereby educational committee members were elected by local residents was changed into one whereby they were nominated by the governor. In 1885, the system of educational committee members was itself abolished. Educational affairs at the municipal level were placed under the authority of the mayor.

With regard to the authority of the Department of Education, it was made clear that this extended to issuing Guidelines for the Course of Study (curriculum criteria) for elementary schools, also to the approval of various regulations established by the prefectural governor (regulations for enforcing school attendance, for establishing and closing schools, for the salaries of teachers in elementary schools, and for the election of educational committee members), as well as to approval of the establishment and closure of prefectural schools. With regard to authority vested in the prefectural governor, this extended to the making of the regulations mentioned above, to the editing and implementation of the Course of Study for elementary schools, to the establishment of secondary-level schools, and to the appointment and dismissal of teachers in municipal schools.

With the advent of the 1880s, great changes came about in the governmental system of Japan, taking such forms as the proclamation of the Meiji Constitution, the opening of the National Diet, and the introduction of the cabinet system. In 1885 the cabinet system was introduced to replace the Grand Council that had existed up to that time. The former Department of Education was renamed as the Ministry of Education. The first Minister of Education to be appointed was Mori Arinori, and it was under his direction that the basic framework of the Japanese education system was put in place. There was no specific article relating to education in the Meiji Constitution of 1889, the assumption being that it was under the direct authority of the Emperor.

There was great debate, in the context of the new political system, about whether the form of regulations pertaining to education was such that they should be established as statutory laws, or such that they should be treated as Imperial orders. In the end, the prevailing opinion in prewar Japan was that as far as educational administration was concerned, education regulations should be established by Imperial orders. The Imperial Rescript on Education, issued in 1890, was, in practice, the supreme education canon in prewar Japan.

Following the promulgation of the Constitution, a series of regulations were enacted, namely the City System and Town and Village System of 1889, and the Prefecture System and the County System of 1890. Through these regulations, the framework of the local administration was established. In accordance with this reform, the Law concerning General Regulations for Local School Matters was promulgated in 1890, and the same year, the Elementary School Order was revised. The structure and authority relating to the local educational administration were clarified, and the basic framework for prewar local educational administration in Japan was established.

Through the above measures, the principle was clearly established that education was not an exclusively local concern, but essentially a national concern, and it was the responsibility of local bodies was to carry out the matters with which they had been entrusted by the nation. In the case of elementary and secondary education, authority with regard to matters of educational content such as educational objectives, the curriculum, textbooks, and service regulations for teachers was vested in the Minister of Education. On the other hand, local government bodies were expected to take responsibility for educational expenses for the establishment and maintenance of schools, equipment, and teachers' salaries. The governor carried out his duties within the framework of direction and supervision by the Minister of Education. The county governor received direction and supervision from the prefectural governor, and in turn was responsible for directing and supervising the mayors of towns and villages in educational administration. One county school inspector was appointed within each county. In addition, in 1897, the office of inspector was created in each prefecture, followed in 1899 by the creation of the office of chief inspector. The inspectors exercised real authority over teaching personnel administration, and they played a significant role in terms of directing local educational administration.

In 1881, the Department of Education issued Guidelines for the Course of Study for Elementary Schools, setting out unified, basic criteria for the curriculum, which until this time had varied widely according to the conditions of prefectures and local areas. The Guidelines specified the subjects to be taught, the educational content of each subject, and the numbers of teaching days and teaching hours. In 1886, the government issued Subjects and their Standards for Elementary School, followed in 1900 by the promulgation of the Third Elementary School Order and its detailed Regulation. In this way, a system of national criteria for the formation of the curriculum

was virtually completed for the prewar period in Japan.

With regard to textbooks, in the early stages of its formation, the Department of Education set about translating and editing foreign textbooks, and at the same time, selected from among privately produced textbooks and supported their dissemination. In 1883, a system was introduced whereby the Department of Education approved textbooks for use. Further development came in 1886 when it was stipulated that “elementary school textbooks shall be limited to those that the Ministry of Education has authorized”. In this way, the textbook authorization system came into being, and state supervision and control of textbooks was further strengthened. From 1903, a system of state editing of textbooks was introduced. From that time on, the government undertook the production and editing of textbooks, and entrusted the publishing and supply of the books to a private company.

2. Postwar reform for education administration

At the end of the war in 1945, with Japan under the control of the Allied Forces, demilitarization, democratization, and the rebuilding of the nation were all taken forward. With the aim of examining the overall concept of educational reform in postwar Japan, the General Headquarters of the Allied Forces (GHQ) requested that U.S. dispatch the United States Education Mission to Japan. The Mission arrived in Japan in 1946, and produced a report containing a series of recommendations on Japanese education reform. Urging reforms, the report criticized the Japanese educational administration in the following terms:

“The Ministry of Education has been the seat of power for those who controlled the minds of Japan. In order to prevent the possible misuse of the power of this office as heretofore constituted, we propose that its administrative controls be reduced. This means that many present controls affecting curricula, methods, materials of instruction, and personnel shall be transferred to prefectural and local administrative units.”

“In the past, regimentation has been compelled by a system of inspectors. This system should be abolished. In its place, there should be established a system of consultants and competent technical advisers who will provide inspiration and guidance, without policing or administrative powers.”

“We recommend that in each prefecture there shall be established an educational committee or agency, which shall be politically independent and composed of representative citizens elected by popular vote.”

The reform of educational administration was carried out in line with the direction of the recommendations in the report.

In the new Constitution of Japan promulgated in 1946, the right to receive education was stipulated as one of the fundamental rights of the people. There was also considerable reflection on the prewar system, in which the bureaucracy decided on the fundamental direction of

education. In place of this prewar system, a legislative system was adopted, whereby the laws and regulations that formed the basis of educational administration were decided in the National Diet. In line with this idea, a number of educational laws determining the structure and management of the new education system were enacted in succession between 1947 and 1949, including the Fundamental Law of Education, the School Education Law, the Board of Education Law, the Social Education Law and the Private School Law. And in 1948, a decision was made in the Diet confirming the invalidation of the Imperial Rescript on Education.

In 1949, by virtue of the enactment of the Law for establishment of a Ministry of Education, the organization and duties of the Ministry were established afresh. The character of the Ministry was greatly changed from what it was in prewar days. The Ministry's job was to reduce those items that required permission or approval from the Ministry and as far as possible delegate authority to local boards of education, while it concentrated on its main functions of providing specialist and technical guidance and advice as well as financial assistance. However, because of the need to maintain educational standards throughout the country as a whole, the Ministry retained the authority to implement financial policies. In March 1947, with the aim of determining the standards for the curriculum and educational content under the new school system, the Ministry issued new Courses of Study. These "aimed to show important items that schools should use as points of reference when preparing and developing teaching plans." Local educational administrators and teachers were able to use the Courses of Study as reference criteria, and prepare curricula on their own initiative in accordance with local conditions and the needs of students. At the same time, the system of state editing of textbooks was abolished, and for the second time, an authorization system was introduced.

In July 1948, the Board of Education Law was enacted, identifying democratization, devolution, and the preservation of local autonomy as central ideas. The main points of the new board of education system are as follows:

- (1) A board of education is an administrative organ of a local public entity, and is an independent organ operating under a representative system.
- (2) Boards of education shall be established in prefectures as well as in municipalities. However, it is possible for towns and villages to combine and form an association, and for that association to establish a board of education.
- (3) A prefectural board of education shall have seven members, and that of a municipality five members. One member shall be a member of the local assembly, elected by vote from among its members, and the other members shall be elected by local residents.
- (4) The board of education will administer and implement matters concerned with education, science and culture, which were formerly the responsibility of the governor or the mayor. Personnel matters in respect of elementary and lower secondary school teachers shall come under the jurisdiction of the municipal board of education.
- (5) A superintendent of education shall be located in the board of education; the

superintendent shall be appointed by the board of education from among people possessing agreed qualifications. The board of education shall establish an office to deal with clerical matters.

- (6) With regard to the educational budget, the board of education shall prepare their own estimate of necessary costs, and shall receive an assessment from the head of the local public entity, and where there is a difference of opinion, both estimates shall be submitted to the local assembly, which shall make a decision.

The independence of the board of education from general administration, the election of board of education members directly by residents, the execution of policies by the superintendent of education who should be an educational professional, and the independent preparation of an education budget by the board of education, were all matters representing a radical reform in local education administration. Boards of education were established in each prefecture and in the five largest cities by 1948, and in all cities, towns and villages by 1952.

Another area where administration was greatly changed is that of private schools. Before the war, matters relating to private schools in respect of such matters as teachers' qualifications, facilities and equipment, and the compilation of the curriculum, were in principle subject to application of the same laws and regulations that applied to public schools. Religious education was forbidden in private schools. The Fundamental Law of Education clearly stipulated that private schools have a public character, and at the same time, confirmed that the right of establishment of private schools should be limited to a special legal entity called a "school juridical person." Freedom of religious education was also approved for private schools. In 1949, the Private School Law was enacted, with the "objective, in the light of the special characteristics of private schools, of developing a healthy private school sector, by means of enhancing their public character while laying emphasis on their autonomy." Respecting the autonomy of private schools, the new law greatly reduced the supervisory authority of government. And subsidization of private schools from public funds became possible.

3. Revising the educational administration system

In 1951, the Allied occupation of Japan came to an end, and Japan regained its sovereignty. In the previous year, 1950, the Korean War had broken out, and with the deepening of the Cold War structures, the situation in the region surrounding Japan also showed signs of change. Against this background, very shortly after regaining independence, the Japanese government began the task of reviewing the policies carried out during the Occupation. In the educational field, the basic structure of postwar education reforms was kept, but the system was adjusted to suit Japanese conditions. More specifically, slight adjustments were made to the processes of democratization and devolution that had formed the central pillars of reforms in educational administration.

With regard to the system of boards of education, no sooner had the system been established than various problems arose with regard to the implementation, for example, over such matters as the unit of establishment, the methods of electing and nominating members of the boards, the relationship between general administration and educational administration, and so on. In 1956, the government began to tackle the task of re-examining the system of boards of education, and submitted a new law to the Diet aimed at reforming local government administration. The main thrust of the new law was aimed at maintaining the system of boards of education as such, but at the same time somewhat curtailing their independence and authority. The superior-subordinate relationship linking central government (Ministry of Education), prefectural boards of education and municipal boards of education was also strengthened. The Board of Education Law was annulled, and in its place, the Law concerning the Organization and Functions of Local Educational Administration was promulgated. By virtue of the new law, the system of boards of education was revised in terms of the following provisions:

- (1) The system of direct election of board members is cancelled, and instead members will be appointed by the head of each local public body with the consent of the assembly.
- (2) Boards shall consist of five members, but there may be three members in the case of municipal boards.
- (3) The superintendent of the prefectural board of education shall be appointed by the prefectural board, subject to the approval of the Minister of Education, and the superintendents of the municipal level shall be appointed by the municipal boards from among the members of these boards with the consent of the prefectural boards of education.
- (4) The power of boards of education to prepare educational budgets and submit drafts shall be cancelled.
- (5) Authority to appoint teaching personnel shall be vested in the prefectural boards of education, based on recommendations forwarded by the municipal boards of education.
- (6) The Minister of Education shall provide the necessary guidance, advice, and assistance to enable prefectural and municipal educational administrators to handle educational matters properly; prefectural boards are expected to provide a similar service to municipalities. The Minister of Education is able to demand necessary corrective measures in cases where a local board of education has acted illegally or in a clearly inappropriate manner.

Under the old Board of Education Law, authority over personnel matters affecting teachers was vested in the municipal board of education, but under the new law, authority concerning the appointment of teachers in public elementary and lower secondary schools was transferred to prefectural boards of education. As a result, whereas previously the transfer of teachers over an area that exceeded the local boundaries of the municipality was difficult, this now became possible. From this time on, the personnel administration of teachers was handled by prefectural

boards of education in line with a procedure whereby the principal of each school could express an opinion regarding his wish to have a particular teacher transferred to his school, and the local board of education would forward all opinions received to the prefectural board of education. In this way, the systematic practice developed, in a way very characteristic of Japan, of transferring teachers employed in public schools, at intervals of a number of years, on the basis of the following criteria: 1) interchange between urban and rural areas; 2) interchange between isolated and populous areas; 3) maintaining an appropriate balance in terms of the age structure of teachers in a school; and 4) avoidance of a long term of service in one particular school.

In 1949, in accordance with a request from the Minister of Education, the Curriculum Council was established as an advisory body to investigate and discuss important matters concerning the curriculum. It was on the basis of a report by the Curriculum Council that a wide-ranging reform of the Courses of Study was carried out in 1958. The reform was implemented against the background of criticism to the effect that the child-centered, activity-based curriculum that became popular as a result of postwar American influence had brought about a decline in children's academic ability. The revision changed the curriculum in such a way as to stress the systematic sequence of teaching matters aimed to strengthen children's basic abilities. At the same time, for the first time since the end of the war, "moral education" was included in the Courses of Study. Moreover, the Courses of Study, which until this time had been issued as "drafts," were given the character of "directives," and acquired the status of "national criteria," thus strengthening their legally binding force. From this time on, it became customary for the Courses of Study to be revised approximately every ten years in accordance with the changing current of the times and educational demands.

Under the Board of Education Law, the power to authorize textbooks was vested in prefectural boards of education. In 1953, however, the power of authorization was unified in the Ministry of Education. Thereafter, amidst allegations of political bias in the content of textbooks, the Ministry of Education strengthened the authorization system. In 1965, the author of a Japanese history textbook who was dissatisfied with the modifications proposed by the Ministry in the course of the authorization process brought a lawsuit against the Ministry, claiming that the textbook authorization system was illegal and unconstitutional. With this lawsuit, controversy over the textbook authorization system raged. The final result of the long continued lawsuit, was that the allegation of unconstitutionality was rejected. However, as a result of criticisms voiced while the lawsuit was in progress, partial revisions were made to the system, including systematization of the authorization procedures and the provision of relief measures concerning textbooks that were unsuccessful in the authorization process.

Furthermore, in accordance with the principle of free compulsory education as stipulated in the Constitution, a system of free distribution of textbooks at compulsory education level was introduced in 1963. In the case of private schools, the authority to select textbooks from among

those that had been authorized was vested in the school principal, while in the case of public schools, it was vested in the boards of education. In practice, the prefectural board of education grouped a number of municipalities together into textbook adoption districts, and the textbooks adopted were the same for all public schools within a particular textbook adoption district. About 500 such districts are established covering the whole of Japan.

Within the framework of the postwar education reform, unionization of teachers was legalized and encouraged. In 1947, the Japan Teachers Union (JTU) was formed, and within a very short time, had become a giant organization with over 500,000 members. In the atmosphere of postwar confusion, the JTU launched activities aimed at the improvement of teachers' living conditions, advances in the democratization of education, and support for the wholesale implementation of reforms. Following the end of the occupation, the JTU developed a movement in opposition to the government's proposed re-evaluation of postwar education reform, calling this re-evaluation as "reverse course," indicating a return to conservatism. Maintaining close links with left-wing bodies such as the Socialist Party and the Communist Party, the JTU began to develop aggressive activities. For its part, the Ministry of Education strengthened its confrontational stance, advocating "safeguarding political neutrality in education". In the latter part of the 1950s and the 1960s, confrontation between the JTU and the Ministry reached its peak over the implementation of teacher evaluation and nationwide achievement tests. The JTU organized nationwide strike protests, while the government invoked the criminal law against many teacher union leaders

From the latter part of the 1970s into the 1980s, trade union activities by teachers began to show signs of stagnation. This was due to a number of factors, including the general acceptance of legal precedents supporting the prohibition of labor dispute activities by public servants, the raising of union fees to provide support for those subject to criminal law procedures, and a decrease of interest in labor movements. A further contributory factor was the large-scale improvement in teachers' salaries as a result of a law designed to secure capable educational personnel. When membership of the JTU was at its peak, it included nearly 90% of all teachers, but by 1985, the proportion had sunk to below 50%. Subsequently, the decline continued, and particularly among young teachers, there was a negative attitude for union membership. Aggressive teacher union activities had by the end of the 1980s virtually disappeared from the Japanese educational world.

4. The debate over reform of educational administration

In the mid-1980s, the National Council on Educational Reform made a wide-ranging survey of the overall picture of education reform in Japan. Their basic thinking regarding reform of educational administration is set out in the following three points:

- (1) In the past, a tendency toward excessive uniformity, a preoccupation with trivial matters,

and an exclusive atmosphere in education has become apparent. Breaking with these tendencies and realizing a form of education that puts emphasis on vitality and individuality through creativity and ingenuity in the classroom, there is a need to take forward a bold and meticulous process of deregulation, including a re-evaluation of the forms of permission and approval, criteria, aid, direction and advice.

- (2) There is a need to emphasize strengthening systems of autonomy, self-reliance and responsibility in schools, prefectural and local boards of education, and local government bodies, and a need to confirm the principles of freedom, autonomy, and acceptance of responsibility in education.
- (3) There is a need to expand the variety of choices and opportunities in such ways as diversifying the school system, creating a network of links joining the educational functions of schools, families, and society, relaxing age and qualification restrictions, and admitting exceptional cases.

The National Council on Educational Reform proposed the following specific reforms:

- ① Re-evaluation of national criteria such as the criteria for establishing universities, the Courses of Study, and so on;
- ② Encouragement to establish private elementary and lower secondary schools;
- ③ Re-evaluation of the division of national and local responsibilities;
- ④ Revitalization and accomplishment of the mission imposed on boards of education;
- ⑤ Improvement of the administration and management of schools (establishment of an accountability system held by individual schools and confirmation of the leadership of school principals).

In 1998, the Central Council for Education issued a report putting the local educational administration into perspective. In particular, the report indicated specific problems with regard to the board of education system, namely: 1) On many occasions, board of education meetings were entirely taken up with formalistic discussion on agenda items that required a practical resolution, so that there was insufficient time for discussion of such matters as how to respond to a wide variety of educational problems. 2) There is a need for policies and devices that will enable the wish of the residents to be more clearly reflected in the appointment of board of education members. 3) From the point of promoting the devolution of authority, the system requiring the approval from upper authority for the appointment of superintendent presents a problem. 4) Because the appointment of the superintendent is carried out as a part of the personnel administration in local bureaucracy, there are cases of people being appointed without sufficient experience in education or educational administration. 5) The secretariat office is weak and there is a lack of specialist personnel. 6) There is a dearth of distinctive policies designed to match the realities and specific characteristics of different regions. 7) Within the process of planning and implementing policies, there is insufficient effort to present information to local residents and to understand and reflect their hopes and wishes.

In response to the above suggestions, in 1999, the Law concerning the Organization and Functions of Local Educational Administration was revised. The approval system for the superintendents was abolished and central control to local education boards was partially relaxed. On the other hand, in the same year, the national government enacted the “Comprehensive Decentralization Law” to promote in a comprehensive way the independence and autonomy of local governments. Unionization of municipalities was promoted to enhance the administrative capacities and financial powers of local governments.

In the postwar reform of educational administration, the decentralization and democratization of education was identified as the most significant issue. The system of American-style local boards of education, which constituted one of the major pillars of postwar reforms, was adjusted to suit Japanese conditions, but has now become a well-established system in Japan. In 2005, the Education System Division of the Central Council for Education issued a report that once again reviewed the board of education system based on the experiences in more than half a century of history since the system was first introduced. It basically reconfirmed the meaning and role of the board of education system as an institution for local education administration and proposed as the basic ideas for further reform as follows: 1) Securing the national standard for education and enhancing the freedom of municipalities and schools. 2) Establishing a thorough system of accountability. 3) Enhancing participation of the parents and local residents.

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日本の教育行政 (記述の要点)

近代的教育制度の導入以来、日本の教育行政がどのように整備され、どのような変化を遂げてきたかを、大きく戦前と戦後に分けてその発展を概観する。日本は中央集権的な教育行政といわれているが、地方教育行政組織の整備もすでに戦前から行われており、義務教育段階は市町村、中等教育は県、高等教育は国が主として担当するという分業体制が構築されていた。わが国は戦前において、すでにきわめて効率的な教育行政ネットワークを作り上げていた。戦後の教育行政改革では教育の地方分権と民主化が最大の課題とされた。戦後改革の中心的な柱であった米国モデルの地方教育委員会制度は、わが国の実情に合わせて修正されたが、導入以来すでに50年以上の歴史を有しており、わが国に完全に定着している。しかしながら、最近の教育行政をめぐる改革論議に示されるように、今あらためて国と地方の役割分担の見直し、教育委員会の活性化が議論されている。

1. 近代的教育行政組織の整備と確立

学制による教育行政機構の構想構想。地方自治制度の整備と教育行政の一元化。内閣制の導入と勅令による教育行政方式の確立。戦前における教育行政制度の基本枠組みの確立。教育課程行政と教科書行政。

2. 戦後の教育行政改革

対日教育使節団の教育行政改革勧告。基本的教育法制の整備。文部省設置法と教育委員会法。私学行政。

3. 教育行政制度の見直し

教育委員会制度の見直し。地方教育行政の組織及び運営に関する法律の制定。教員定期異動制度の導入。教育課程行政と教科書行政。教員組合とその活動。

4. 臨時教育会議以降の教育行政改革論議

臨時教育審議会での教育行政改革論。1998年の中央教育審議会「地方教育行政の在り方」報告。2005年の中央教育審議会「教育委員会の在り方」報告。