

# New Trends in Preschool Education and Childcare in Japan: Transition to a “Comprehensive Support System for Children and Child-rearing”<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In August 2012, the Japanese government enacted the following three laws concerning children and child-rearing:<sup>2</sup> 1. Revised Law for the Center for Early Childhood Education and Care (Popular name); 2. Act on Child Education and Childcare Support; and 3. Adjustment Act on Related Laws for Enforcement of the Two Laws

*The Comprehensive Support System for Children and Childcare* (hereinafter referred to as CSSCC) , based on the three laws, will officially be launched from April 2015 by three central-government entities — the Cabinet Office (CO), the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology (MEXT), the Ministry of Health, Labor & Welfare (MHLW) — and by each prefecture and municipality<sup>3</sup>. Because the CSSCC will be enforced as part of the *Integrated Reform of the Social Security and Tax Systems*, it will be financially supported by the revenue increase from the consumption tax hike<sup>4</sup>.

The above is an epoch-making trend in the history of ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) in Japan. Needless to say, the purpose of the CSSCC is to establish a “society where people can have and raise children with little burden and more comfort” and to realize “the sound growth of each child”. The followings are the key points in accomplishing this purpose<sup>5</sup>:

1. **Comprehensive offering of high-quality ECEC**
2. **Quantitative expansion and securing of childcare**
3. **Improvement in the support for childcare and child-rearing in local communities**

Stable funding for every facility and provider involved in support for early childhood education, childcare, and child-rearing will be secured under a common system as much as possible. Municipalities will assume the responsibility for this support. They are asked to gain an understanding of the demand for the services and to promote the five-year plan for benefits and for child-rearing projects in their community.

Historically in Japan, measures against a declining birthrate have already been established by the comprehensive administration since the 1990s. The government has discussed matters in established working groups to integrally resolve long-standing issues —such as designing a system for securing financial resources, the unification of kindergartens and day nurseries, and the realization of various means of support for child-rearing in the community— especially since 2003, when the *Basic Act for Measures to Cope with a Society with a Declining Birthrate* was enacted. In particular, under the current government,

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<sup>1</sup> This article is to supplement the previous article *Preschool Education and Care in Japan*  
<http://www.nier.go.jp/English/educationjapan/pdf/201109ECEC.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Official names of 1 and 3 are: 1. Act to Revise a Part of the Laws Concerning the Promotion of a Comprehensive Offering of Education and Childcare for Preschool Children; and 3. Act on the Adjustment of Related Laws for the Enforcement of an Act to Revise a Part of the Laws Concerning the Promotion of a Comprehensive Offering of Education and Childcare for Preschool Children.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shinseido/meeting/index.html>  
<http://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shinseido/outline/pdf/setsumei.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The consumption tax will be raised by the current government in two steps. In the first step, the consumption tax was raised from 5% to 8% (in April 2014). It was announced that the tax would be raised from 8% to 10% in the second step in October 2015, but this is expected to be postponed until April 2017 (as of November 2014). The financial resources required for the CSSCC is said to be more than one trillion yen per year, of which the consumption-tax hike was to cover 700 billion yen. Anyway, both national and regional government budgets will make up for the initial revenue shortfall.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shinseido/pdf/leaflet.pdf>

which is about to enact the CSSCC, the Cabinet Office has played a leading role in responding to these issues through organizing the “Children and Child-rearing Conference” since 2013, by setting up a system where the representatives of every stakeholders (experts in this field, local governments, representatives of employee and employers of ECEC facilities, people raising children, people engaging in child-rearing support, etc.) were invited and took part in the policy-making process concerning ECEC and child-rearing. Because the CSSCC involves a new benefit plan for parents and facilities, a special committee (the Working Group) was also established to discuss the various standards and formulas for benefits.

A summary of the CSSCC is explained below, in line with the above-mentioned three points:

### **1. Comprehensive Offering of High-quality ECEC: Coexistence of Kindergartens, Day Nurseries, and “Authorized ECEC Centers”, and the Dissemination and Expansion of “ECEC Centers”**

“**Authorized ECEC Centers**” (targeted at from zero to five-year olds, hereinafter just refer to as ECEC Centers) were designed as facilities that would integrally provide high-quality early childhood education and care, regardless of the parents’ work status or other situations of the family, so as to resolve the issues regarding the dual system under which kindergartens and day nurseries have existed separately. As pilot models, ECEC Centers have accumulated experience through trial operations started in FY2006. Statistically, as of April 1st, 2014, 1,359 centers have been authorized as ECEC Centers throughout Japan<sup>6</sup>. (This outline was referred to in the previous article.)

One of the biggest changes in the revision of the *Law for Early Childhood Education and Care Centers* is the establishment of “**Unified Type ECEC Centers** (collaborative kindergarten and day nursery type ECEC centers)” **as a single facility that is positioned as both a school education institution and as a social welfare facility**. In the Unified Type of ECEC Centers, the legal foundation and the curriculum standards are also unified, resolving the issues with the dual system.

Apart from above type of center, there are different categories of ECEC Centers, such as Kindergarten Type, Day Nursery Type, and Local Discretionary Type centers. In the *Law for Early Childhood Education and Care Centers*, these three categories and the “Unified Type of ECEC Centers” are explained in separate chapters.

Let me explain the reasons why ECEC centers still coexist with kindergartens and day nurseries. ECEC Centers, which were started with 35 pilot models in 2006, had complex procedures concerning authorization and operational processes. This was because ECEC Centers were developed from existing kindergartens and day nurseries in the form of either a collaborative or a single body, whose governing authorities and legal foundations are basically different.

In Japan, both kindergartens and day nurseries have their own history and traditions. Especially in the case of high-quality private facilities, many of them preferred to keep their operations as they were. Therefore, the number of facilities that agreed to be reorganized into ECEC Centers did not increase immediately after the introduction of the system. (Please refer to Table 1.)

In reality, however, communities have issues concerning shortages of child-rearing support services, waiting lists for children in day nurseries (especially children under the age of three), and the consolidation and abolishment of facilities for infants and toddlers due to the declining birthrate. In the current situation, kindergarten and day nurseries can contribute to our society by responding to the desperate need for ECEC and child-rearing support, only through a comprehensive support service by the appropriate introduction of “one more function” (for kindergartens, this is the function like a day nursery, and for day nurseries, it is the function like a kindergarten) in addition to their traditional role. This was the very beginning of reorganization of initial body into ECEC centers named “kindergarten type” or “day nursery type”.

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<sup>6</sup> While the statistics of 2014 shows that there were 12,905 kindergartens and 22,425 day-nurseries throughout Japan.

**Table 1: The Quantitative Expansion of ECEC Centers  
(Transition in the Number of Authorized Centers)**

Situation for Each Year (As of Apr 1)	Total Number of Authorizations	Public or Private		Breakdown by Category			
		Public	Private	Unified Type	Kindergarten Type	Day Nursery Type	Local Discretionary Type
2014	1,359	252	1,107	720	410	189	40
2013	1,099	220	879	595	316	155	33
2012	909	181	728	486	272	121	30
2011	762	149	613	406	225	100	31
2010	532	122	410	241	180	86	25
2009	358	87	271	158	125	55	20
2008	229	55	174	104	76	35	14
2007	94	23	71	45	32	13	4

<http://www.youho.go.jp/joho.html>

In the CSSCC, local governments must take responsibility for authorizing ECEC Centers and for handling fiscal measures, which will make the procedures for the establishment and operational processes much simpler than in the previous system. The current problem is in entrenching and promoting the ECEC Centers, regardless of their category.

For staff of Unified Type of ECEC Centers, qualifications as a kindergarten teacher and as a childcare worker are both required. But in 2014 only 75% of staff meets this requirement. In response to this situation, special treatment has been given during the transition period, for five years from 2015 when the CSSCC started. With this treatment, people who have one of the two qualifications can gain another qualification more easily, in consideration of their experience and the qualification they already have.

Staffs who work for Unified Type of ECEC Centers are to be called “**ECEC teachers (*hoiku kyoyu*)**” under the CSSCC. An “ECEC teacher” is not an independent and unified “qualification” now, but is instead the “name of the occupation (profession)” in the transition stage, which also indicates the direction of future teacher training and qualification of ECEC staff.

Under the CSSCC, ECEC should be accessible to every parent. Each municipality must understand its needs for ECEC, and the necessary amount of time for childcare, through the office of each public facility and the municipal office<sup>7</sup>. In response to the demand, the municipality should introduce and find a proper ECEC Center for every user. The CSSCC was designed so that kindergartens, day nurseries, and ECEC Centers (public and private) will satisfy the demands of parents through integrally providing children with high-level early childhood education and care.

In order to enhance the quality of ECEC, the following improvements are required, regardless of their category (kindergarten type, day nursery type, or unified type of ECEC center): fostering and training of staff; adjustment of the number of children whom an ECEC staff take care of; and improvements to the equipment and facilities. In addition to these, the establishment of a framework for quality assurance is required. Currently, it is urgently necessary for universities and other research institutes to conduct studies on this matter.

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<sup>7</sup> In the CSSCC, the following three classifications for childcare needs-acknowledgement are introduced :  
**Acknowledgement No. 1:** In a case of applying for "standard education time" (4 hours in the morning). The age of children shall be three or older. In such a case, the child can use a kindergarten or an ECEC Center.  
**Acknowledgement No. 2:** In a case that the age of the child is three or older, and the situation of the family falls into the "necessary reasons to receive childcare service", the child shall be able to use a day nursery or an ECEC Center.  
**Acknowledgement No. 3:** In a case that the child is younger than three, and the situation of the family falls into the "necessary reasons to receive childcare service", the child shall be able to use a day nursery, an ECEC Center, or a small-scale childcare service (mentioned later).

**Table 2: Kindergartens, Day Nurseries, and ECEC Centers in the CSSCC**

Category of Facility*		Kindergarten/ Kindergarten Type ECEC Center (Kindergarten Part)** (School Education Institute)	Day Nursery/ Day Nursery Type ECEC Center ( Child Welfare Facility)	Unified Type of ECEC Center (Single Facility positioned as both a School Education Institute and a Child Welfare Facility)
Governing Authority	Supervision	MEXT		CO
	Allocation of Financial Resources	MEXT***	CO	
Legal Foundation		School Education Law/ Law for the Early Childhood Education and Care Centers	Child Welfare Law/ Law for the Early Childhood Education and Care Centers	Law for the Early Childhood Education and Care Centers
Standards for Curriculum (Content and Method)		“National Curriculum Standards for Kindergartens (Guidelines for Kindergarten Education)/ “Curriculum for Education and Childcare in Unified Type of ECEC Centers”	Guidelines for Nursery Care at Day Nurseries/ “Curriculum for Education and Childcare in Unified Type of ECEC Centers”	“Curriculum for Education and Childcare in Unified Type of ECEC Centers” (ECEC Centers that belong to other categories must also comply with this curriculum)
Target		From ages 3 to 5	From ages 0 to 5, requiring childcare due to the reasons such as a parent’s work commitments, job seeking, health issues, studies, or child abuse	From ages 0 to 5, regardless of the parents’ work status or other reasons
Qualification for the Staff		“Kindergarten teacher certificate” ( <i>youchien kyoyu</i> ) on the basis of the Educational Personnel Certification Law	“Qualified childcare worker” ( <i>hoikushi****</i> ) on the basis of the Child Welfare Laws and Regulations	From ages 0 to2: “Qualified childcare worker ( <i>hoikushi</i> )” From ages 3 to 5: “ECEC teacher ( <i>hoiku kyoyu</i> )” (that is, qualified both as a kindergarten teacher and a qualified childcare worker)
Enrollment Requirements and Procedures		When parents/guardians decide, they may apply to a kindergarten (no limits for enrollment).	Municipalities determine the enrollment of children, considering the “necessary reasons to receive childcare service”	Those who wish to enroll may apply directly to an ECEC Center. (In cases of considerations for parents in special situations, municipalities may determine the enrollment of the children.)
Education and Childcare Time		<b>4 hours a day (standard service)</b> . Since 1997, an “extra childcare service” in the afternoon has been possible.	<b>8 hours a day (standard service)</b> . Longer childcare services up to 11 hours have become possible by means of a municipal notice.	<b>According to the child’s family situation, 4 hours a day, or 8 hours a day (in a standard case)</b> . The standard time based on the educational curriculum shall be 4 hours in the morning.

\* Apart from the three categories shown in this table, there is a “Local Discretion Type of ECEC Center”. These non-authorized facilities at national level do not belong to any school education institute or childcare facility, but can function as ECEC Centers by the authorization of local governments regardless of their operating body (for example, commercial enterprises with day nursery businesses are included in this category). However, as clearly indicated in Table 1, their number

of authorizations is only about 40 facilities in 2014, which means that they are not a majority. Therefore, they are omitted from this table for the sake of convenience.

\*\* In some cases, kindergarten type ECEC centers have childcare facilities for ages from zero to two in their premises. The qualification needed for the staffs who work for this kind of childcare facilities is a qualified childcare worker, because they are not involved in school education.

\*\*\* In cases where private kindergartens that choose not to receive the Facility-type Benefit (mentioned below) but instead choose to receive the existing Private Education Institution Aid and Subsidy for Kindergarten Fees, the CO is not involved.

\*\*\*\* *Hoikushi* is a national qualification for ECEC, and is often translated into “a nursery teacher” or into “a childcare teacher” in English, but this qualification is originally different from the teacher’s certificate under school education system.

## 2. Quantitative Expansion and Securing of Childcare: Innovation in Benefit Plans

As an important part of the improvements to the child-rearing environment, it is imperative to resolve the policy issue regarding the waiting lists for childcare, especially the quantitative shortage of childcare facilities that receive the children in the babyhood stage and during the first stage of primary school. The CSSCC set the following concrete numerical targets for a five year period (from FY2013 to 2017):

- Increase the number of children enrolled in ECEC centers, kindergartens, and day nurseries from 2,250,000 to 2,650,000.
- Especially increase the number of children from ages 0 to 2, many of whom are now included in the waiting lists, from 860,000 to 1,220,000<sup>8</sup>.

That means to realize the expansion of child intake capacity by 400,000 in five years, 90% of which is for children under age 3.

The benefit plan for the facilities, which has been complex, is now more simply divided into two categories. These are “**Facility-type Benefits**” and “**Community-type Childcare Benefits**”:

### (1) Transition to a unified financial resource: Introduction of the “Facility-type Benefit” Plan

The operating costs of ECEC have traditionally been covered by three kinds of financial resources. The cost of day nurseries have been covered by the Day Nursery Operating Management Fund of the MHLW; kindergartens by the Private Education Institution Aid and Subsidy for Kindergarten Fees by the MEXT; and ECEC Centers by the Fund to comfort Parents/Guardians within child-rearing from the government supplementary budget.

From April 2015, however, for ECEC Centers, public kindergartens, public day nurseries, and private kindergartens that chose to receive Facility-type Benefits after the CSSCC was launched, the financial resources will be unified and stabilized into a “Facility-type Benefit” plan<sup>9</sup>.

“Benefit”, in this regard, means the subsidy that is to be given “from municipalities to parents/guardians”. But the subsidy will not be given directly to the parents. Instead, the “legal substitute reception method” is applied to make sure that the money is used for ECEC. Therefore, the government gives the subsidy to the facility where the children are enrolled. Parents/guardians do not pay all the cost for the ECEC service, but instead pay the difference between the actual cost and the benefit given to the facility.

### (2) Subsidies for small-scale facilities: Introduction of “Community-type Childcare Benefits”

In urban areas, the issue of the shortage of childcare facilities for children under the age of three is particularly serious. According to a survey on the needs for childcare, the need for a “childcare service at a small-scale facility near home” is increasing. The target of the “Community-type Childcare Benefit” is small-scale facilities, which include “small-scale childcare facilities” that take care of 6 to 19 children;

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.mhlw.go.jp/bunya/kodomo/pdf/taikijidokaisho\\_01.pdf](http://www.mhlw.go.jp/bunya/kodomo/pdf/taikijidokaisho_01.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Management costs are paid by municipalities to private day nurseries as before. Private kindergartens can choose “whether to receive the Facility-type Benefit or Private Education Institution Aid”, as before. In the latter case, the kindergartens will further develop their school ethos as independent private schools.

“family day cares (nursing mothers)” with 5 children or less; home-visit-type childcare services (baby sitters); and day nurseries in the premises of an office (a company).

With the aim of establishing the above-mentioned facilities, the benefit plan, whose operating process had varied according to different municipalities, is required to become “unified and organized in line with the national standard, as much as possible”. Various discussions have taken place regarding the quality assurance of this childcare service, which is becoming a problem as the number of childcare facilities ready to accept children is rapidly being secured.

An eight-level payment system, according to the income of the parents, is applied to these two types of benefit plans, so as to reduce the gap between children in the current situation where financial resources are limited. To be specific, municipalities set the amount based on the national standard, while considering the situation of each family. An entire year, FY2014, has been allotted for this adjustment.

### **3. Improvements in Children and Child-rearing in the Community: “Community Childcare and Child-rearing Support Projects”**

Child-rearing support projects in this category include various programs and services such as:

- 1) Advisory and consultation services for users to access suitable ECEC facilities or child-rearing support;
- 2) Running Community-based Child-rearing Support Centers;
- 3) Health check and counseling service for pregnant women;
- 4) Visits to all families with babies within 4 months old;
- 5) Home-visiting child-rearing support especially to prevent child abuse and neglect;
- 6) Short-period stay service at children’s homes or other child welfare facilities for children whose guardians cannot take care of them at night with disease or other reasons;
- 7) Running Family Support Centers which mediate families in need of childcare and families happy to help them;
- 8) Providing temporary childcare services for the favor of parents at ECEC facilities;
- 9) Extended care services late in the afternoon by kindergartens or late in the evening by day-nurseries or ECEC centers;
- 10) Taking medical care of children with disease at ECEC facilities;
- 11) After-school children’s clubs (After-school child sound upholding services) for primary school children inside or outside of schools;
- 12) Extra financial support for low-income families to purchase childcare or school supplies, to pay school lunch fees and school events fees;
- 13) Research or promotion programs to encourage the involvement of various operating bodies in the CSSCC<sup>10</sup>.

As you can see, the ages of the children covered by these projects promoted in the community ranges from before birth to the school children.

Based on the financial support by the government, the “Community Childcare and Child-rearing Support Projects” aim to provide stable and detailed services as much as possible, according to the situations of each region and area and to the needs of each family, whereas as opposed to the benefit plan mentioned in Section 2, which will be standardized nationwide.

Prefectures and municipalities are asked to grasp the needs for childcare services in their area and to develop a five-year plan. Each municipality will hold a local “Childcare and Child-rearing Conference” for this purpose. For example, some municipalities are considering the establishment of accessible one-stop child-rearing support centers<sup>11</sup>, where users can enjoy every kind of service concerning childbirth and

<sup>10</sup> [ww8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shinseido/outline/pdf/setsume4.pdf](http://ww8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shinseido/outline/pdf/setsume4.pdf) pp.68-92

<sup>11</sup> [http://kono-machi.net/neuvola/0825\\_01.pdf](http://kono-machi.net/neuvola/0825_01.pdf);  
<http://www.city.wako.lg.jp/home/fukushi/kodomo/ninshin-shussan/neuvola.html>

child-rearing. It is expected that many cases will be put into practice, and good experiences will be disseminated in the next five years.

## **Conclusion**

As is clear from the above article, for the first time in history, a comprehensive support system for children and child-rearing based on the actual needs for ECEC with stable (as much as possible) fiscal measures are about to be implemented nationwide. Since this innovation involves significant changes, there will still be many operational problems, and further adjustments will be needed.

What is mentioned in this article is a situation in a transition period, with a focus on developments in the next five years. It shows a pluralistic and comprehensive image of how the ECEC is developing, in response to the current trends in families and the economic situation in Japan.

Please refer to “*Suku Suku, Japan! -the Information Booklet for the Comprehensive Support System for Children and Child-rearing*” published by the government, for a better understanding of the CSSCC.

*Japanese:* [http://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shinseido/event/publicity/naruhodo\\_book\\_2609.html](http://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shinseido/event/publicity/naruhodo_book_2609.html)

*English:* [http://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shinseido/event/publicity/pdf/naruhodo\\_book\\_2609/eng/print.pdf](http://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shinseido/event/publicity/pdf/naruhodo_book_2609/eng/print.pdf)

*Chinese:* [http://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shinseido/event/publicity/pdf/naruhodo\\_book\\_2609/china/print.pdf](http://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shinseido/event/publicity/pdf/naruhodo_book_2609/china/print.pdf)

*Korean:* [http://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shinseido/event/publicity/pdf/naruhodo\\_book\\_2609/korea/print.pdf](http://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shinseido/event/publicity/pdf/naruhodo_book_2609/korea/print.pdf)

*Spanish:* [http://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shinseido/event/publicity/pdf/naruhodo\\_book\\_2609/espa/print.pdf](http://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shinseido/event/publicity/pdf/naruhodo_book_2609/espa/print.pdf)

*Portuguese:* [http://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shinseido/event/publicity/pdf/naruhodo\\_book\\_2609/port/print.pdf](http://www8.cao.go.jp/shoushi/shinseido/event/publicity/pdf/naruhodo_book_2609/port/print.pdf)

*Mariko Ichimi Abumiya*

## 日本の就学前教育の新しい動き —「子ども・子育て支援新制度」への移行—

2012年8月、日本の国会は、子ども・子育てに関する3つの法律、①「改訂・認定こども園法（通称）」②「子ども・子育て支援法」、③「2つの法律の施行に伴う関連法規調整法」を成立させた。3法に基づく「子ども・子育て支援新制度」(“Comprehensive Support System for Children and Child-rearing”)は、内閣府・文部科学省・厚生労働省の3中央政府機関と各都道府県、基礎自治体である市町村が責任を持ち、**2015年4月から本格的に始動する**。新制度は、政府の「税と社会保障の一体改革」の一環として施行されるため、消費税率の引上げによる増収が、これを財政的に支える。

以上の動向は、日本の乳幼児期の教育とケア（ECEC Early Childhood Education and Care）の歴史上、画期的な動きである。

言うまでもなく、「新制度」の目的は、「子どもを産み、育てやすい社会」の創設と、それによる「一人一人の子どもの健やかな成長」である。そのために、政府は、**1. 質の高い幼児期の学校教育・保育の総合的提供、2. 保育の量的拡大・確保、3. 地域における子ども・子育て支援の充実**、に焦点をあてると説明している。

本稿では、日本の1990年代以降の少子化社会を持続可能な社会にするための諸政策が2003年の「少子化対策基本法」の制定や上記3法として実をむすび、内閣府を主導とする「子ども・子育て会議」において議論され設計された新制度について、以上3項に即して概要を政府の説明にもとづき、また執筆担当者の見解も一定程度交えて解説するものである。

1. では、質の高い幼児期の学校教育・保育の総合的な提供が具体的には、「認定こども園」という、親の状況に関わらずあらゆる乳幼児が利用しやすい施設によって担われる方向性について示し、日本における幼稚園と保育所のよいところをとった認定こども園が、法的にも位置付けを強化され、既存の両施設との協調・共存もはかりながら徐々に普及していく過渡的状况について説明する。その際に日本では幼保一体化が完全な一元化になりえていない現状の複雑さについても言及する。

2. では、保育の量的な拡大がどのような財源による給付制度によって支えられるのかを、「施設型給付費」（公私立の認定こども園・幼稚園・公立保育所）と、「地域型保育給付費」（3歳未満児を受け入れる小規模施設・保育の場合）に分けて説明する。また保育ニーズの認定制度や給付の仕組みについても説明する。

3. では、以上のほかにも地域における就学前から学童期の子どもに関わる、さらに多様な地域のニーズに即した子育て支援制度を、各自自治体で5か年計画に応じて整備していくことについて簡単に紹介する。

日本の幼児教育・保育は「すくすく Japan!」のスローガンのもと、以上のような新しい段階に入っている。今後とも注視と研究調査による質保証が必要である。