

2. Study on the Future of Upper Secondary Education

Leader: KUDO Bunzo, Director, Department for Elementary and
Secondary Education Research

(1) Purpose and Aim of Study

- As can be seen by developments such as the creation of integrated courses, the expansion of credit-based systems and the systematization of unified lower and upper secondary school education, the reforms to upper secondary school education that began in the 1990s have created a more flexible system and fueled greater diversification and differentiation among schools. At the same time, factors such as declining student numbers pose challenges in terms of reorganization of upper secondary schools. Initiatives to address this challenge, including school amalgamations, are now underway in most prefectures.

- The aims of this study are to bring to light the achievements and outstanding issues in upper secondary school reform, as well as to develop knowledge of the conditions governing the success or failure of reform processes and to propose approaches, methods, and frameworks for use when planning for the future of upper secondary education.

(2) Outline of Research Results

- Status of upper secondary school reorganization

What is evident from reorganization plans is that there are some regions in which deliberative councils are being held regularly and reorganization is proceeding gradually, others such as Tokyo and Kanagawa Prefecture that are advancing reorganization on a large scale, and still others where consolidation is not being pursued at all in full-day course schools. This demonstrates that reforms are being planned and implemented in line with the prevailing conditions in each prefecture.

- Content of upper secondary school reform

In full-day courses, almost all prefectures are planning and implementing reforms such as the introduction of integrated courses, establishment of departments in fields such as welfare and information science, adoption of credit-based systems in full-day courses, and establishment of unified lower

and upper secondary schools.

- Establishment and development of integrated courses

Integrated courses have now been established in all prefectures, but the number of schools offering them varies from prefecture to prefecture. The reported effects of establishing integrated courses include the realization of an expanded range of options for students, increases in the number of applications to schools in most prefectures, and enhanced motivation for learning.

Meanwhile, the questionnaire survey conducted as part of this study revealed the following:

- Around 80% of students respond positively to questions concerning satisfaction at studying in an integrated course.
- Most student respondents were also positive about the significance of learning about “industrial society and humanity.”
- The most commonly established stream is “humanities,” followed by “the natural world” and then “business.”

- Deployment of day/evening courses

There are some regional differences in day/evening courses, but advancements are being made in establishment of “multi-schedule” day/evening courses. Upper secondary schools operating multi-schedule day/evening courses report that the degree of freedom in subject choice contributes to the development of self-responsibility and individuality among students, and that the dropout and temporary withdrawal rates have been decreasing.

- Establishment and development of unified lower and upper secondary schools

Examining the status of establishment of schools for unified lower and upper secondary education prefecture by prefecture reveals that some prefectures have established full secondary education schools, joint type and cooperative type schools, while some have established mainly full secondary education schools and joint types, and others have established mainly cooperative type schools.

The results of a questionnaire survey of unified lower and upper secondary schools show that many joint type lower secondary schools take advantage of the special exception to curricular standards, but most joint type upper secondary schools and cooperative type schools do not.

Open-ended responses to the survey of schools highlight the successes of unified lower and upper secondary education, such as the reinforcement and extension of academic ability, the degree of freedom afforded by the absence of entrance examinations, and the positive effects of mixing different age groups. Challenges identified, on the other hand, include understanding student needs, improving guidance methods, and developing facilities.

- Conclusions and outstanding issues

When viewed as a whole, the reforms to upper secondary school education can be seen as having furnished a new system to meet the diversity of needs arising from social change, as well as having contributed to improvements in student learning and lifestyle through reform initiatives at the individual school level.

Into the future, in light of expectations concerning progress on educational quality, it will be important to address the question of how best to create frameworks that can effectively assure quality while at the same time being premised on diversity in the student body.