

Lower Secondary Education in Japan

Lower secondary schools (junior high school, *Tyugakko* in Japanese) are institutions “in the secondary stage of compulsory education system with the purpose of providing general education commensurate with children’s mental and physical developments on the basis of primary school education” (Article 45 of the School Education Law). All graduates of primary school enroll for three years, ranging in age from 12 to 15, with the enrollment ratio reaching almost 100%. The school year starts in April and ends in March of the following year. Students of lower secondary school, regardless of where they live in Japan, follow the same curriculum under the Course of Study. Pursuant to the provisions for free compulsory education, no tuition fees are charged at any national and public primary and lower secondary schools.

1. History

The current lower secondary school system was established in April 1947. Under the old school system (before and during the World War II periods), no lower secondary school was in place that corresponded to that of current secondary school system. Elementary school education of six years was mandatory under the old system. Post-elementary education institutions for graduates of elementary schools were there in higher elementary schools, youth schools, various kinds of vocational schools, etc.

Throughout the years before and during World War II, extension of the compulsory education was debated, but it was not settled until the end of the war, when three years of lower secondary school education were added to the compulsory education, making it a total of nine years.

Lower secondary schools, thus instituted newly in the compulsory education system, were a result of the war in the wake of its devastation and misery, accompanying formidable difficulties for realization. At the outset in 1947, old elementary school buildings and facilities were used (especially former higher elementary schools) and, in many instances, former youth schools were converted. In cities bombarded heavily during the war, schooling was conducted in open spaces without roofs, some of which were later replaced by school buildings and sites instituted through war-damage reconstruction programs. In some cases, former military grounds and facilities were turned over for use. In establishing public lower secondary schools, many local residents provided help and contributed to construction works. As a result of these efforts and cooperation, lower secondary schools grew in number to almost the current level in two to three years.

Prior to the inauguration and implementation of lower secondary schools, in March of 1947, the “Course of Study (Draft)” was published and sections for individual subjects were aligned by December of the same year. Unlike the current course of study, it was more of a road map that allowed schools broader discretion. In 1949, the Course of Study was revised for the first time, through consultations with the Curriculum Council, an advisory body for the Minister of Education. Since that time, the Course of Study has been revised at almost 10-year intervals up to the current version, according to relevant circumstances. Major features of such revisions made so far are summarized as follows:

Implemented in 1951

Integration and alteration of subjects were made. (E.g., Independent study was replaced by specialized educational activities. Calligraphy was integrated into national language (Japanese), while national history was incorporated into social studies. Physical education was altered to health and physical education, and vocational subject to vocation/home economics subject.)

Decreed in 1958 and implemented in 1962 (except for moral education, which was implemented in October 1958)

Increased criticism of the new education following the fall of the academic level. Systematic learning materials based on the logic of the disciplines. Moral education was newly allotted. Vocation/home economics were changed to technology/home economics.

Decreed in 1969 and implemented in 1972

It set condensed curriculums highly influenced by the so-called “modernization of educational contents” movement, which intended to provide higher educational contents through the compulsory educational stage.

Decreed in 1977 and implemented in 1981

Reflecting on the outcome of previous revisions, the course of study slightly reduced contents of learning, sorting out the goals and contents for each subject and thus aiming to provide fulfilling school life with ample latitude.

Decreed in 1989 and implemented in 1993

The revision was intended to promote education to nurture individuality, further reducing the contents of learning for subjects. It aimed to materialize the development of spiritually affluent human traits capable of coping per se with changes in society. Eight requisite subjects and ten

elective subjects.

Decreed in 1999 and implemented in 2002

A five-day-week system was introduced. Foreign language, hitherto an elective subject, was made a requisite subject. (In most schools, in fact, it had already been introduced substantially as a requisite.) Provisions pertaining to club activities were deleted. Newly introduced were hours for integrated studies. A substantial reduction in contents of learning was implemented. The revision was deemed to have brought about much broader revisions than earlier.

Decreed in 2008 and to be implemented in 2012

New directions were introduced, aiming to materialize the development of a well-balanced capability with knowledge and moral and physical strength, having nothing to do with latitude or cramming. Acquisitions of basic knowledge and skills as well as development of thinking, judgmental and expressive capabilities are emphasized. Class hours, which had been reduced constantly since the 1981 revision, are on the increase for the first time in about 30 years.

2. Numbers of Schools, Pupils, and Teachers

As of May 1, 2010, there are 10,815 lower secondary schools, of which 75 (0.7%) are national, 9,982 (92.3%) public and 758 (7.0%) private. National lower secondary schools are attached to faculties of education at national universities, while public lower secondary schools are managed by municipalities. The total number of students is 1,817,273 boys and 1,740,893 girls.

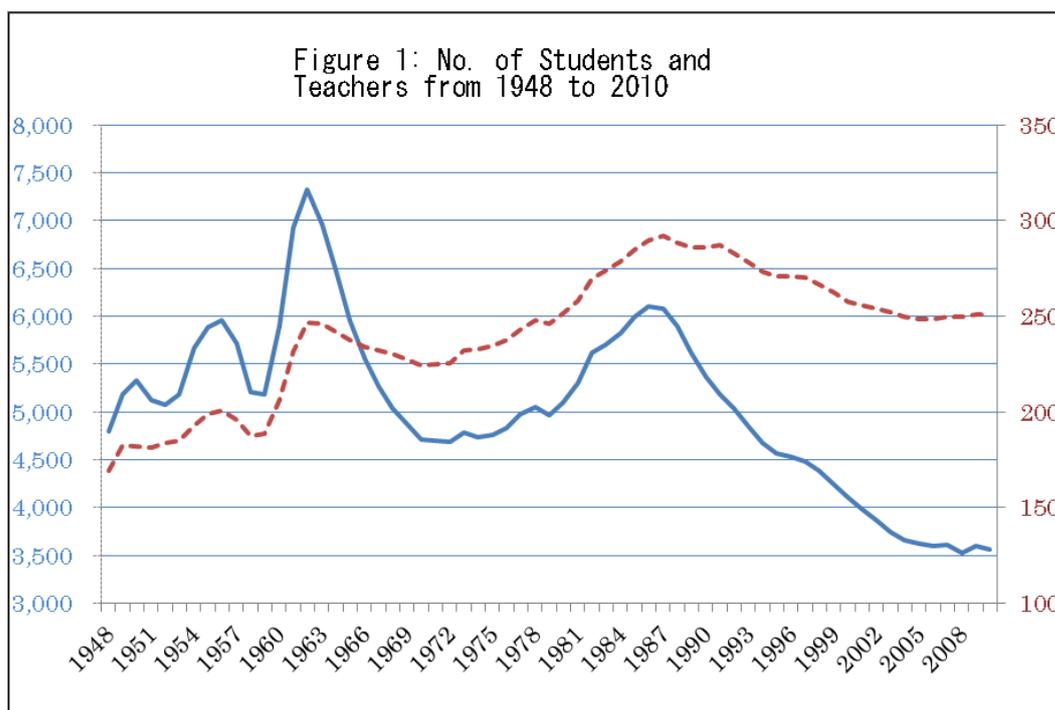
The number of teachers is 250,899, of which women teachers account for 41.9% at 105,155.

While the number of pupils per classroom is stipulated not to exceed 40, the actual number is left to the discretion of each municipality within the limit of not more than 40 per classroom. As of May 2011, the average number of students per classroom is 29.4, with the average number of students per teacher at 14.2. To materialize more finely textured instructions, there are plans to reduce the number of per-classroom students.

Figure 1 shows the changes in the numbers of students and teachers from 1948 to 2010.

No. of Students
(thousands)

No. of Teachers
(thousands)



Source: School Basic Survey 2010, MEXT

The number of students peaked in 1962 with a record high at 7,328 thousand (so-called baby-boomers). There was another peak at 6,106 thousand (second generation of baby-boomers) in 1986, which was followed by a rapid decline in line with the dropping birth rate.

The number of teachers indicates a similar tendency up to the 1990s in accordance with the rises and falls of the number of students, which, since then, registers a slightly smaller decline compared to the decrease in the number of students.

3. Curriculum

Pursuant to the enforcement of School Education Law, the curriculum at lower secondary schools comprises requisite subjects, elective subjects, moral education, special activities, and integrated studies. At private schools, moral education may be substituted with religion.

Requisite subjects

Japanese - including brush and pen calligraphy

Social studies - Fields of geography, history, and civics

Mathematics - Fields of algebra and geometry

Science - First field (physics, chemistry), second field (biology, geosciences)

Music - including instrument playing

Fine arts

Health and physical education - Field of physicals, field of health

Technology/home economics - Field of technology, field of home economics

English language

Prior to the last revision, languages other than English were allowed to be taught for foreign languages. Under the current course of study, English has been designated as the foreign language in principle. As for elective subjects, languages other than English are allowed to be chosen.

Elective subjects

Japanese, social studies, mathematics, science, music, fine arts, health and physical education, technology/home economics, foreign language, and other specifically essential subjects

Moral education

Special activities

Class activities, pupils' council activity, school events

Integrated studies

Religion (at private schools only)

4. Outlines of Lower Secondary School Life

Private lower secondary schools, most of national lower secondary schools, and part of public lower secondary schools (primarily integral secondary schools) can select applicant students by means of entrance examination and other methods. Ordinarily, students are not detained at current grades; they are advanced to next grades in automatic promotions.

At the primary school, one teacher assigned to the classroom fundamentally teaches almost all subjects (class-based teacher assignment). At the lower secondary school, however, a teacher is assigned to one specific subject (subject-based teacher assignment). Some teachers are given both responsibilities for the classroom as well as for the specific subject. Usually, the class-assigned teacher is given the task of providing students with academic and career guidance. Also, it is generally the class-assigned teacher's responsibility to prepare students' documents and records such as teaching-learning record (Shido-Yoroku), report cards, dossiers, etc. required for clerical works at the school. Of late, however, in increasing cases special experts are taking over the task of career guidance.

In many lower secondary schools, periodic examinations are in place at the end of a school term (except for some schools where unit-specific examinations are conducted in lieu of periodic examinations), the results of which, along with daily learning attitudes, are reflected in the dossier (teacher's evaluations) prepared at the time of promotions.

At typical lower secondary schools, five to six hours of classroom time is provided per day, Monday through Friday (Saturday for some private schools).

The following table shows a typical daily schedule at secondary schools:

| | 6 school-hour | 5 school-hour |
|-------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| Arrival at school | 08:30 ~ 08:40 | 08:30 ~ 08:40 |
| Short Home Room | 08:40 ~ 08:50 | 08:40 ~ 08:50 |
| 1st class | 08:55 ~ 09:45 | 08:55 ~ 09:45 |
| 2nd class | 09:55 ~ 10:45 | 09:55 ~ 10:45 |
| 3rd class | 10:55 ~ 11:45 | 10:55 ~ 11:45 |
| 4th class | 11:55 ~ 12:45 | 11:55 ~ 12:45 |
| School lunch | 12:50 ~ 13:05 | 12:50 ~ 13:05 |
| Lunch break | 13:05 ~ 13:25 | 13:05 ~ 13:25 |
| 5th class | 13:30 ~ 14:20 | 13:30 ~ 14:20 |
| 6th class | 14:30 ~ 15:20 | |
| Cleaning | 15:25 ~ 15:35 | 14:25 ~ 14:35 |
| Short Home Room | 15:40 ~ 15:50 | 14:40 ~ 14:50 |
| Club activity | Summer time ~ 17:45 | |
| | Winter time ~ 17:15 | |

In many schools, school lunch is served. Where lunch is not served, parents must supply homemade lunches. It is rare for students to go home for lunch.

Cleaning is done by the students themselves. Classrooms, special classrooms, gymnasiums, corridors, lavatories, and other common facilities are covered in the cleanup.

Predominantly, schools designate the uniforms and gym clothes that students are required to wear when they commute to and from schools and during their school lives. Also, in some regions and at certain schools, name tags are worn, but in recent years, they are being abolished in view of the need to ensure protection of personal information. There are some schools that do not have uniforms.

School events such as entrance ceremonies, field trips, athletic meets/sports days (Undokai),

cultural festivals, excursions, and commencement ceremonies are common.

Most students participate in club activities (sometimes club activities are required). Club activities are divided into two categories: athletic and cultural, with examples as follows. However, not all schools provide the same activities, depending on the availability of suitable teachers and required facilities.

Athletic

Swimming, track & field, gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, baseball, basketball, volleyball, Judo, Kendo, soccer, Ping-Pong, skiing, Sumo, handball, softball, etc.

Cultural

Brass band, broadcasting, *Shogi* (Japanese chess), *Go*, computer, chorus, *Rakugo* (comic monologue), traditional arts, local history, scientific experiments, fine arts, creative works, etc.

For certain club activities, competitions at national levels are held.

Approximately 50% of lower secondary school students attend cram schools (*Jyuku*). Some 10% take correspondence courses, and about 4% use home tutors. The reasons for studying via *Jyuku*, correspondence courses, and home tutors are to supplement classroom studies and prepare for entrance examinations for higher schools of education (upper secondary schools).

5. Post Graduation Paths

Graduates of lower secondary schools are entitled to advance to schools of upper secondary education such as upper secondary schools, technical schools, five-year technical colleges, etc.

The total number of graduates from lower secondary schools in March 2010 was 1,227,736.

As for post-graduation paths, 98.04% advanced to senior high schools, 0.35% to technical schools, 0.41% to employment, 1.20% to others (domestic help, foreign high schools, etc. and those with undecided paths), and 0.01% covers unknown or deceased.

6. Issues

Issues surrounding lower secondary schools are multiple: dilution of self control and normative

consciousness, insufficient formation of life habits, increase in problematical behaviors, bullying, decreased physical strength, etc., which have resulted from rapidly changing social environments.

Therefore, in the current revision of the course of study, great significance has been placed on nurturing students' thinking, judging, and expressive capabilities, improvement in motivation for learning, formation of study habits, and enrichment of leadership guidance to help materialize all of these, on the premise of acquiring fundamental and basic knowledge and skills.

Truancy is also an issue. In 2010, about 100 thousand pupils, accounting for 3% of the total, stayed away from school. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, truancy is defined as “absenteeism for more than 30 days within one fiscal year, which is not attributable to illness or economic reasons.” In fact, many of these truant pupils are suspected of attending so-called alternative schools such as free schools.

This may suggest that truancy is not necessarily a simple avoidance of schools derived from social maladjustment but that there are underlying complex circumstances. After all, children have been attending schools since the modern school system came into force. It would be unwise to consider truancy as something unnatural, as some advocate that flexible treatment is needed, for instance, to provide them with fields of learning outside of school.

Reference

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日本の中学校 (記述の要点)

中学校は修業年限が3年間の学校で、9年間の義務教育期間の最後の3年間にあたる。就学率はほぼ100%である。就学に関しては原則として年齢主義をとっており、満12歳になった最初の4月1日に第1学年に就学する。成績不良による原級留置や優秀な児童に対する飛び級は行われない。

学年は4月に始まり翌年の3月に終了する。2010年5月1日現在の学校数は10,815校、90%以上が公立学校(国立または市区町村立)である。

1. 歴史

わが国における中学校の歴史の変遷について、1947年の創設から、それ以降に至るまでを、学習指導要領の変遷を中心に概説した。

2. 学校数・生徒数・教員数

学校数・生徒数・教員数の統計情報を示した。他に一学級あたりの平均生徒数、教員一人あたりの平均生徒数、1948年から2010年までの生徒数と教員数の推移も示した。

3. 教育課程

現行(2012年度より実施)の指導要領より、教育課程の概略を示した。

4. 中学校生活の概説

一般的な中学校の生活について、その概略を示した。

5. 卒業後の進路

卒業後の進路について統計情報を示した。

6. 課題

急速に変化する社会状況の中で、中学校が直面している課題の中で、不登校について概説した。