

Redesigning Compulsory Education

Summary of the Report of the Central Council for Education

The Central Council for Education has issued a report titled “Redesigning Compulsory Education for a New Era,” the product of deliberations conducted in keeping with an agreement between the government and the ruling parties concluded in November 2004. Reform of Japan's compulsory education system will be implemented henceforth on the basis of the recommendations in this report.

Key Points

1. Approach the improvement and enhancement of compulsory education as an element of our national strategy.
2. Implement reforms that decentralize authority and provide greater discretion and latitude to municipalities and schools (such as by transferring authority over personnel and class composition to municipalities).
3. Maintain the central government's responsibility for the basic infrastructure of compulsory education, including courses of study, teacher training, and guaranteed funding, and for the analysis of the educational outcomes including the assessment of academic ability.
4. Maintain Japan's system of state-subsidized funding for compulsory education through national and local burden sharing while further expanding local discretion.

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Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan

Redesigning Compulsory Education for a New Era

■ Purpose and Principles of Compulsory Education

We live in an age of change, an age of confusion, an age of intense international competition. In such an age the role of compulsory education in shaping the character of each citizen and nurturing the people who will make up our nation and society is all the more vital. The central government has a duty to guarantee the fundamentals of compulsory education (equal opportunity, high standards, and free educational services) to ensure that nothing can ever compromise the bedrock of our nation and society.

All people shall have the right to receive an equal education correspondent to their ability, as provided for by law. All people shall be obligated to have all boys and girls under their protection receive ordinary education as provided for by law. Such compulsory education shall be free. — Article 26, Constitution of Japan

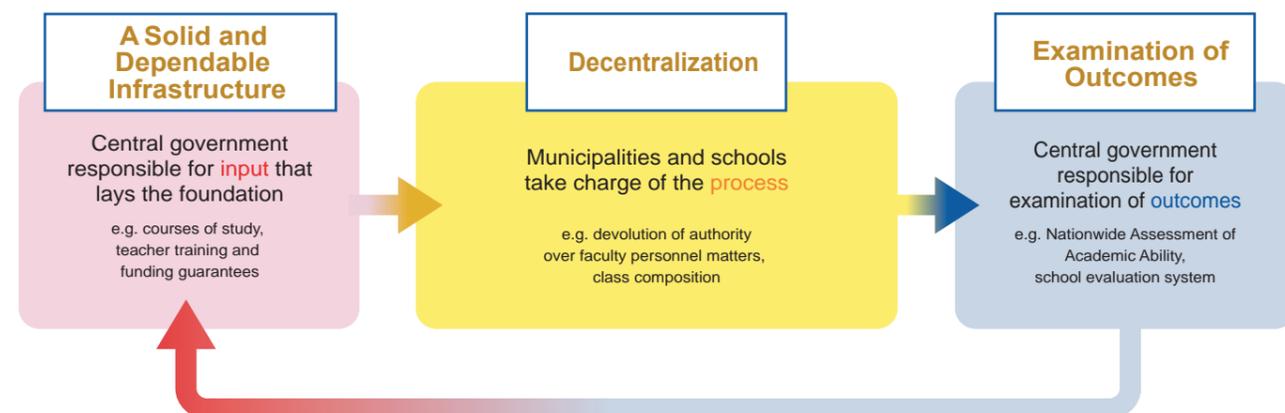
■ Compulsory Education's New Look

The goal of reform should be to create better schools with more capable teachers, and thereby help our children grow into better human beings.

■ Reform of Compulsory Education

The system of compulsory education should be restructured so as to ensure educational quality within the following framework:

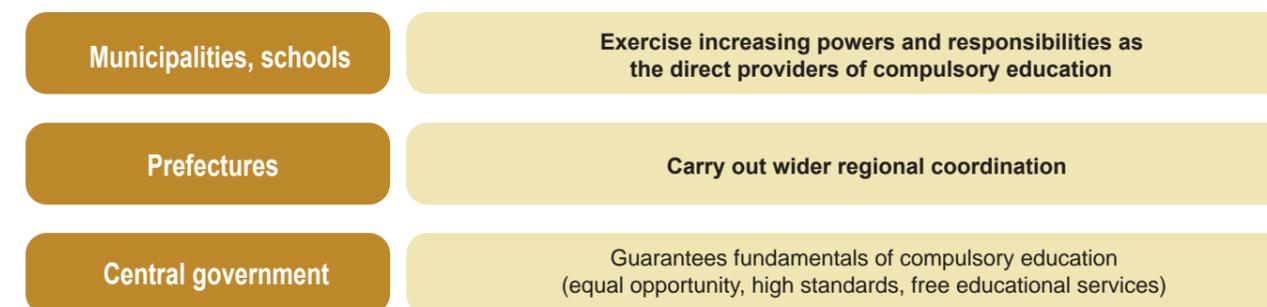
1. The central government shall take responsibility for setting goals and providing the infrastructure needed to achieve them.
2. With this as a foundation, the powers and responsibilities of local municipalities and schools shall be expanded through decentralization.
3. At the same time, the central government shall be responsible for examining educational outcomes.



■ Central Government, Prefectures, and Municipalities : Roles and Relationship

Schools play a central role in compulsory education.

The central government, prefectures, and municipalities must cooperate to support the schools.



■ Importance of Educational Infrastructure

The infrastructure that supports compulsory education must be solid and unshakeable. For this reason, the central government, prefectures, and municipalities must each perform their assigned responsibilities, including budgetary provisions. The success or failure of education depends on the ability to secure talented and capable teachers.

■ Sharing the Burden of Compulsory Education Costs

- While pursuing reform of compulsory education, we must be careful to protect the fundamentals of our compulsory education system and reaffirm the central government's responsibility toward compulsory education by maintaining our current system of funding, whereby the central government subsidizes 50% of the costs of teacher salaries. This is an excellent system for guaranteeing education funding in that it ensures that the full cost of teacher salaries is covered by a combination of national and local government disbursements. With this system as a basis, we should institute improvements in the “block-grant” system to further expand the discretionary spending powers of local authorities.
- We must also work to ensure full funding for such core needs for creating a better educational environment as the purchase of teaching materials and textbooks.
- With regard to construction and improvement of school facilities, while local authorities should be given more latitude, there is still a need for the central government to provide funding for specific purposes. For the safety of our children, it is especially important that the central government take responsibility to make schools earthquake-resistant.

Guarantee Education Quality by Setting Clear Goals and Examining Outcomes

Clarifying the mission of compulsory education and improving content

[Clearly articulate the mission of compulsory education]

- Balance academic achievement with “richness of mind” and “physical development”
- Guarantee curriculum content and high standards
- Promote partnerships and burden-sharing among schools, families, and local communities

[Improve educational content]※

① Review of courses of study

- Increase motivation to learn, establish good study habits
- Set clear attainment goals for each subject
- Cultivate language proficiency and enhance math and science curriculum
- Enhance English instruction in elementary school
- Improve the curriculum and enhance instructional support, while taking into account the importance of integrated studies
- Enhance school libraries and reading activities
- Actively implement achievement-based instruction and small-group instruction
- Cultivate a rich mind in a healthy body
- Expand experiential learning, including learning through voluntary activities as well as experiences in nature; promote career-oriented education that cultivates an understanding of work and various professions
- Improve linkages between early childhood education and elementary education

② Nationwide Assessment of Academic Ability : checking levels of attainment and understanding

- Use results to benefit student learning by improving teaching methods on the basis of objective data
- Take into consideration not only motivating students to learn more, but also avoiding school ranking and unhealthy competition

※ The Council's Educational Program Section is carrying out a more detailed review of courses of study.

[Rethinking the compulsory education system]

- Create close links and contact between different types of schools
- Enhance early childhood education, promote kindergarten enrollment, and create comprehensive facilities that combine preschool child-care and education services
- For truant children, consider the adoption of a system for fulfilling requirements of compulsory education in alternative educational facilities
- Improve services and support for children with learning disabilities or ADHD

Develop Unshakeable Trust in Our Teachers

2

Improving teacher quality

Fostering Trusted, High-Quality Teachers

[Measures for training and securing quantitatively and qualitatively superior teachers]

- Steadily improve and enhance teacher training at the undergraduate level※
- Make use of professional graduate schools for teacher training※
- Adopt a teacher certification renewal system※
- Improve and refine hiring process; enhance in-service training
- Improve and enhance teacher evaluation, as by creating the position of “Super Teacher” for excellent teachers
- Actively tap into a variety of human resources, such as retirees and business people; tap into people from the private sector to serve as assistant principals as well as principals

※The Council's Teacher Fostering Section is carrying out a more detailed review of the teacher education and certification system.

Improve the Quality of Education by Giving Local Authorities and Schools More Autonomy and Encouraging them to Innovate

3

Reforming at the school and school-board level

Establishing school autonomy and self-governance

- Expand the authority of schools over matters of personnel, budget allocation, and class composition
- Enhance support for school operations, consider a system that would allow for the creation of positions to assist principals with a degree of authority
- Ensure the quality of education, require schools to conduct self-evaluations and make the results public, enhance external evaluation, and provide national support for enhancement of these activities
- Promote parent/guardian and community participation and cooperation in school management

Revision of the school board system

- Organizational flexibility should be increased as much as possible within the basic framework of the school board system(e.g. number of board members, division of power) to enable school boards to administer in a manner suited to the circumstances of their local communities
- Strengthen the partnership between the heads of local governments and school boards and strengthen the school boards' functions

[Central Government, Prefectures and Municipalities: Roles and Relationships]

- The central government shall set national standards for education. In order to ensure the conditions needed for implementing the standards, the central government shall develop a basic framework of the school system and formulate national content standards.
- Local authorities shall work to improve the quality of education independently in a manner adapted to regional conditions.
- The central government, the prefectures, and the municipalities shall each allocate necessary budgets.
- Devolution of authority from the prefectures to the municipalities and from the boards of education to the schools shall be the basic direction of reform.
- Jurisdiction over teacher personnel matters should be reexamined with a view to transferring authority to the municipalities. Transfer of authority should be tested first in core cities and then considered for other municipalities on the basis of the outcomes. (A system should be adopted whereby urban areas cooperate with isolated islands or mountain communities to ensure an adequate supply of teachers throughout the region.)
- To move compulsory education further toward the ideal of small group instruction, a new class-size-reduction plan shall be drawn up. Municipal boards of education and schools will have more authority and responsibility with regard to class composition to ensure that the instructional format is appropriate to the particular conditions of each area and school.

[Common understanding]

- ① Compulsory education is a crucial issue for the entire nation
- ② Compulsory education needs stable and guaranteed sources of funding

▶ 1. System of National Grants for Compulsory Education (overview)

[Basic function] ⇒ Allows the central government to take responsibility for sustaining the fundamentals of compulsory education (equal opportunity, high standards, free educational services) as stipulated by the Constitution of Japan

[Overview of current system]

- Municipalities establish and operate elementary and lower secondary schools
- Prefectures appoint teaching staff and pay their salaries
- The central government bears 1/2 the cost of their salaries

Cost of teacher salaries for all public elementary and middle schools (about 700,000 teachers and other staff)

Prefectures: 50%

Central Government : 50%
about 2.5 trillion yen (FY 2004)

▶ 2. What is the “Local Government Plan”?

- This refers to a “Proposal for Reform of National Grants” compiled and issued by six organizations representing local governments in August 2004
- The proposal calls for the total elimination of state subsidies for compulsory education and transfer of corresponding tax revenue sources to the prefectural governments by the second reform phase (beginning FY 2007), and the elimination of 0.8 trillion yen in subsidies for lower secondary school teacher salaries and transfer of the corresponding tax revenue sources during the first reform phase (through FY 2006)
- The proposal also calls for implementation or deliberation of the following:
 - Legal provisions to prevent the emergence of marked disparities in education funding among prefectures
 - Due respect for the wishes of the municipalities that establish and operate elementary and lower secondary schools coupled with moves to expand the authority and role of municipalities in regard to compulsory education
 - Expansion of tax exemptions for corporate contributions to education and culture

▶ 3. Conclusions of Council Deliberations

① Position on three points

Position of the Six Local Government Organizations

Shifting 850 billion yen earmarked for lower secondary schools to general revenue

Improving the quality of education

Shifting the funding source to general revenue will raise the awareness of students, parents and guardians and teaching staff, and improve the quality of education

Certainty and predictability of funding

Adequate education spending is assured, even if the funding source is shifted to general revenue

No head of a local government would cut education spending. Regional shortages can still be compensated by using the local allocation tax.

Allowing greater latitude to local authorities

By shifting to general-revenue funding, local authorities will have more discretion, including the freedom to take advantage of external human resources

Various measures addressing issues such as class composition and allocation of teachers will be promoted

Conclusions of Council Deliberations

Specific reforms relating to organizational management of schools and improvement of teacher quality will be included among the report's recommendations (these issues are unrelated to the source of funding)

Because state subsidies for compulsory education must be budgeted by law, they make funding more certain and predictable than general-revenue allocations

On the basis of current trends, cuts in the local allocation tax can be expected. With the cost of teacher salaries expected to rise, adequate funding for teacher salaries could become an issue.

Specific reforms for transferring personnel authority and making class composition more flexible will be included among the report's recommendations (these issues are unrelated to the source of funding)

② Majority position of local municipalities

- Two thirds of Japan's municipal assemblies have issued statements calling for a status quo regarding the current state subsidy system.
- What the six local government organizations are really interested in is transferring subsidies for which local governments have to petition the central government, and not the transfer of compulsory education funding, which is mandatory in any case, to general revenue funding.

③ Conclusions of the Central Council for Education

- Even if compulsory education funding were shifted to general-revenue funding, this would not increase local educational autonomy (e.g. flexibility with regard to class composition) as the six organizations suggest (it would only increase the freedom to cut education spending).
- The kind of education that the six organizations propose can be achieved by increasing the autonomy of municipalities and schools (as recommended in this report).
- Treating lower secondary school teacher salaries differently from elementary school teacher salaries by shifting the former only to general-revenue funding has no rational basis and is inappropriate.

National Grants for School Facilities

[Overview of the current system] In order to ensure equal educational opportunities and to maintain and improve educational standards nationwide, the central government must cover a certain percentage of the costs incurred by the construction and improvement of elementary and lower-secondary school facilities, and provide necessary grants.

Position of the Six Local Government Organizations

Construction and improvement of school facilities go on around the country on a continuous basis; grants for specific projects should be eliminated and replaced with general-revenue funding. With regard to the lack of progress in making schools earthquake-resistant, prefectural governments can be expected to use their own judgment to systematically pursue earthquake-resistant construction and improvement if general funding is made available.

Conclusions of Council Deliberations

- The prefectures are not expanding education spending from their own independent revenue sources
 - Disparities among prefectures must be corrected
- For these two reasons, it is appropriate that after implementing reform to expand the autonomy of local governments, the central government provides funding earmarked for maintaining school facilities and bears the responsibility for promoting the shift to earthquake-resistant school facilities.

“Local Government Financial Reform” (extract)

Agreement between the Government and the Ruling Parties

The fundamentals of compulsory education shall be maintained and the central government shall continue to take responsibility for them. With this basic policy in mind, the government shall deliberate measures for implementing the funding proposals in the “Local Government Plan” and at the same time hold broader deliberations on the best way to maintain and raise educational standards and other basic issues of compulsory education.

The Central Council for Education shall convey its findings regarding these issues by the autumn of 2005. (extract of the November 26, 2004 agreement)

The fundamentals of compulsory education will be maintained and the National Grant for Compulsory Education will be firmly upheld. Within the framework of this basic policy, the central government’s share of elementary and lower secondary school costs will be reduced to one-third, and subsidy cuts and tax-source transfers equivalent to approximately 0.85 trillion yen will be implemented without fail.

In addition, the ruling parties will conduct further deliberations on compulsory and upper secondary education and the roles of the central, prefectural, and municipal governments. (extract of the November 30, 2005 agreement)

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Information on the CCE Compulsory Education Special Committee, including the full report, meeting minutes, reference materials can be found at <http://www.mext.go.jp/gimu/index.htm>