

Chapter 1

**SOUND DEVELOPMENT OF
CHILDREN'S MINDS AND BODIES**

Part 1 Improving Child Fitness

1 Importance of Child Fitness

Physical fitness is absolutely essential for humans to develop, grow, and engage in creative activities. It is the source for the energy people require to develop their intellect and exercise their intellectual capabilities, as well as the source for the energy needed for day-to-day life. Humans *qua* humans utilize their physical fitness, intellectual capability, and energy in combination when engaging in activities. Physical fitness is an extremely important element in the “zest for living.” Achieving physical fitness, the “fuel” for all human activity, from childhood is thus very important for the future of children. Consequently, the communities, schools, and families that protect and nurture children need to have an accurate awareness of child fitness.

On the importance of child fitness, the educational materials prepared for parents and guardians by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) as part of the “Child Fitness Campaign” to be discussed later contained the following message offered by Daichi Suzuki, gold medalist in the 100-meter backstroke at the Seoul Olympics (see Column 1).

Column

1

Message on the Importance of Child Fitness

Although I did win the gold medal in the 100-meter backstroke at the Seoul Olympics, I was not always in better shape than others of my age when I was a child. Quite the contrary; I could well have been called a physically fragile child.

A little while after I started swimming, though, my physical strength improved and swimming then became quite fun. Before I knew it, I had become fairly good at swimming and was able to participate in a variety of competitions.

Swimming boosted my physical fitness, but it improved not only my physique but also helped me cultivate the desire and concentration to take on other challenges and enhanced my academic ability.

In pushing my competitive skills to the next level, I learned that I had to pay attention to all aspects of my lifestyle, including eating a balanced diet and getting sufficient rest.

This attention has not only helped me win a gold medal but has also given me the physical and mental health I enjoy now.

Parents and guardians should understand the importance of physical fitness and give their children numerous chances to engage in outdoor play and sports. I sincerely hope that they will become actively involved in the day-to-day lives of their children to ensure that their children acquire regular lifestyle habits.



▲ Daichi Suzuki

2 Concrete Approaches to Improving Child Fitness

In light of the state of child fitness as discussed in the Foreword, the Central Council for Education on April 11, 2001 held an inquiry on “Comprehensive Measures to Improve the Physical Fitness of Children.” The Sports/Youth Subcommittee of the Central Council for Education discussed the causes of declining physical fitness, means of motivating people to exercise, steps to help people enjoy exercise and sports, and measures for formulating desirable lifestyle habits to improve physical fitness; on September 30, 2002, the “Comprehensive Measures to Improve the Physical Fitness of Children” were compiled as recommendations by the Central Council for Education.

These recommendations pointed out that physical fitness is the wellspring of human activity, that it is also integrally connected to maintaining and enhancing physical health and to enhancing mental health in terms of desire and energy, and that the problem of declining physical fitness among children impacts not

only the children themselves but also the nation's future. There are a variety of interacting causes for the decline in physical fitness—inadequate public awareness on physical fitness, changes in the living environment such as urbanization and the increasing convenience of day-to-day living, and the irregular sleeping and eating patterns of children—with the result being that children have fewer opportunities to get any exercise. Therefore the recommendations suggest specific measures that governments, schools, families and local communities should take to ensure that children exercise more and that children acquire appropriate lifestyle habits.

Based on these recommendations, MEXT from FY2003 developed the following measures as concrete approaches to improving child fitness.

(1) Child Fitness Improvement Campaigns

MEXT is implementing nationwide campaign projects to stress the importance of physical fitness.

1) Preparing and distributing campaign posters

MEXT has solicited posters and slogans on improving physical fitness from elementary students nationwide and prepared campaign posters for distribution to kindergartens and elementary schools around the country. MEXT received a total of 5,198 entries in FY2004 and awarded the most outstanding entries the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Award.

2) Hosting Central Events

MEXT has been holding “Child Fitness Improvement Campaign Central Events” to let children and their families experience the fun of physical activity while interacting with other family members and friends.

In FY2004, MEXT held the Central Events on the Sports Day on October 11 in the Komazawa Olympic Park General Sports Center (Setagaya Ward, Tokyo). Children and accompanying family members participated in an awards ceremony for campaign posters and slogans, a “Fun with Exercise” event for parents and children to enjoy exercise together, sports clinics with former Olympic competitors and other top athletes, sessions to allow participants to try out new sports, a parent-child physical fitness measurement booth and other events.

The Central Events have helped educate a broad segment of the public on the importance for children of pursuing physical fitness and of integrating exercise and sports into their day-to-day lives.

3) Starting a website

In April 2004 MEXT started a “Child Fitness Improvement Website” (<http://www.japan-sports.or.jp/kodomo/>) that offers accurate information on physical fitness, data on the present state and characteristics of child fitness, regular lifestyle habits, and the new physical fitness test*; the website also introduces outdoor games and sports and provides information on comprehensive community sports clubs.



▲ Child Fitness Improvement Campaign Poster
Winner of the 2004 Minister of Education,
Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Award



▲ 2004 Child Fitness Improvement Campaign Central Events

* New physical fitness test

A test for people 6 to 79 years of age that measures muscle strength, flexibility, and other facets of physical fitness. The test items include grip strength, upper body lifts, straight-leg forward bends, 50-meter dash, and softball throw. This test is used in the “Physical Fitness and Athletic Ability Survey.”

Users of the website can enter test results from the new physical fitness test (6–11 year olds) and determine the balance between physical fitness and athletic ability and see current nationwide averages and graphs showing comparisons with nationwide averages from the time the children’s parents were children themselves (30 years ago). Users can also download “Challenge Sheets” to set out their own objectives, undertake exercise and sports, and get into the habit of exercising as well as “Lifestyle Habit Checksheets” to develop regular lifestyle habits.



▲ Child Fitness Improvement Website

4) Other

As one campaign project, MEXT composed and publicized a Campaign Song & Dance (tentative name) in FY2004 to motivate children to exercise with their families and friends, and endeavored to organize town meetings as forums for education and exchanges of views on the importance of child fitness.

(2) Face-to-Face Interaction and Instruction with Athletes

MEXT has organized projects in which former Olympic competitors and other top-level athletes have been invited to participate in sports experiential classrooms for children held by local governments nationwide to improve child fitness; these athletes directly interact with children and help them experience the fun of sports.

Example of Face-to-Face Interaction/Instruction with Athletes Chibikko Swimming Camp in Shinjo City, Aichi Prefecture

Kyoko Iwasaki, gold medallist in the women's 200-meter breaststroke at the Barcelona Olympics, was invited as an instructor to this camp.

Even before the camp opened, Iwasaki's flowing style with unwasted motion in the individual medley served as an outstanding model for the children to emulate.

The 48 participating local 5th and 6th graders from elementary schools in the city were divided into two groups, which Iwasaki then taught about how to kick, how to use their hands, and other fundamental aspects of the breaststroke. Even children a bit nervous at first soon were all smiles under Iwasaki's kind and meticulous instruction. They practiced as hard as they could to copy Iwasaki's movements.

After words of thanks from the participants at the closing ceremony—"I would like to use the things I learned here today so I can swim faster"—commemorative photographs were taken. The camp wrapped up with a message of encouragement from Iwasaki: "It's important to keep trying day after day and not give up, no matter what you are doing."



▲ Scene from the Chibikko Swimming Camp

(3) Preparing and Distributing Sports/Health Handbooks

MEXT has prepared and distributed to older elementary school students a "Genki-up Handbook" as a handbook to get children to take an interest in their own bodies, to set their own objectives, and to exercise and adopt regular lifestyle habits; and to younger elementary school students and kindergarteners a "Genki-up Calendar" that introduces fun exercise games that children can do on an everyday basis with friends and family and that features reward seals to motivate children to acquire the habit of exercise naturally while having fun.

To raise the awareness of parents and guardians, MEXT has prepared and distributed an educational pamphlet entitled "Improving Child Fitness" to describe the environment surrounding children, the importance of physical fitness, and the causes for declining physical fitness in order to promote understanding on improving child fitness.



▲ Genki-up Handbook



▲ Genki-up Calendar

(4) Practical Projects to Improve Child Fitness

In addition to the above projects, MEXT from FY2004 has designated model communities nationwide, researched and analyzed child fitness and lifestyles at present, and initiated new “Practical Projects to Improve Child Fitness” that involve practical activities designed in accordance with local conditions (Figure 1-1-1).

More specifically, each implementing community sets up an executive committee comprising school personnel, PTA members, collaborators from the community, sports organization representatives, and academic experts, and establishes a system whereby schools, families and communities can cooperate in improving child fitness. The executive committee clarifies the issues to be addressed given the level of physical fitness and the lifestyles of children in the implementing community and then stipulates topics for the implementing community. Practical activities—educational activities, program development, and improvements to the environment around children—will then be pursued in line with these topics and tailored to the conditions in the community. Activities verified to be effective via projects will then be introduced nationwide to serve in improving child fitness in all parts of the country.

Figure 1-1-1 List of Implementing Communities for Child Fitness Improvement Projects

(FY2004: 42 cities, wards, towns, and villages)

Block	Prefecture	City, ward, town or village
Tohoku	Iwate Miyagi Yamagata	Tono City Osato Town Yonezawa City
Kanto	Ibaraki Saitama Chiba Tokyo Kanagawa	Sanwa Town, Hokota Town Yashio City Kimitsu City, Misaki Town, Chiba City Meguro Ward, Setagaya Ward Yokohama City
Kita-shinetsu	Niigata Toyama Ishikawa Fukui Nagano	Seiro Town Toyama City Nanao City Eiheiji City Achi Village, Agematsu Town
Tokai	Shizuoka Aichi	Hamakita City Chita City, Shinjo City, Mito Town
Kinki	Kyoto Osaka Wakayama	Seika Town Kashihara City Arita City
Chugoku	Tottori Shimane Okayama Hiroshima Yamaguchi	Tottori City Uonan Town Sanyo Town Higashi-hiroshima City, Aki Takada City Hagi City
Shikoku	Tokushima Kagawa Ehime	Sanagochi Village, Kamiyama Town Kannonji City Toyo City
Kyushu	Fukuoka Nagasaki Kumamoto Miyazaki Kagoshima Okinawa	Kasuga City Saikai Town Yatsushiro City Kobayashi City Kikai Town, Wadamari Town Sashiki Town

Part 2 Maintaining and Improving Children's Health

Health issues such as drug abuse among schoolchildren and lifestyle diseases have garnered attention in recent years, and learning about health will play an increasingly important role in future.

Maintaining and improving mental and physical health first requires that children themselves learn to follow the "Three Principles of Health": a balanced diet, appropriate exercise, and sufficient rest/sleep. Children must become aware of the value of health, adopt an attitude of treating themselves well, learn ways of coping with stress, and gain the practical ability to cut themselves off from things that are not healthy. To those ends, children must learn about health to gain correct knowledge and better understanding about health on a day-to-day basis and put into practice the measures necessary to maintain and improve their health over their lifetimes.

1 Promoting Food Education

The changes in the social environment in recent years affecting eating habits have distorted children's consumption of nutrients, produced irregular eating patterns such as skipping breakfast, and increased the tendency towards obesity (Figure 1-1-2, Foreword Diagram 4).

For children in their growing years, a balanced diet is essential for nurturing a sound mind and body and is extremely important also because it has a major impact on the formation of desirable eating habits.

For that reason, children need to learn to determine for themselves how to ensure nutritious meals and how to assess the quality and safety of food products based on accurate knowledge and information so that they are able to manage their own diets.

Diet-related issues are primarily a matter for families, but eating habits continue to change rapidly against a background of changing social circumstances and food product distribution.

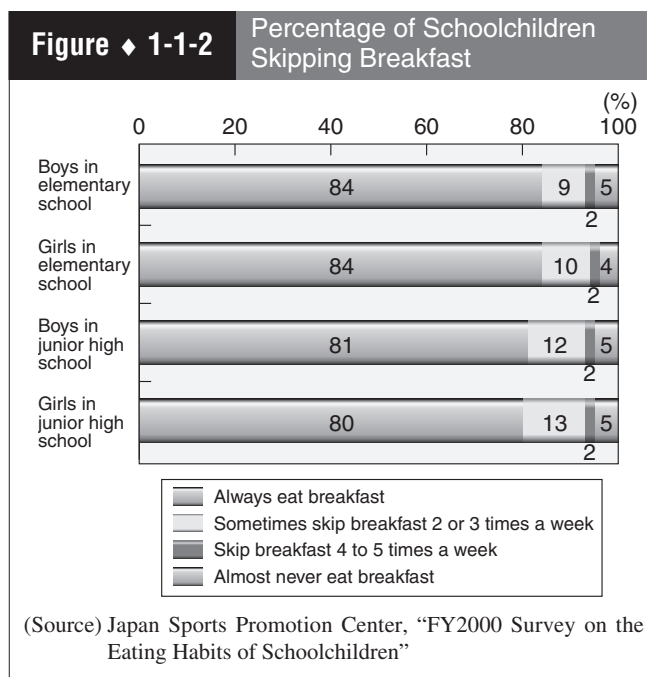
Given this situation, MEXT will be promoting food education in schools in cooperation with families and communities, centered on the diet and nutrition teacher system to be launched in April 2005.

(1) Establishing a Diet and Nutrition Teacher System

School guidance on diet has thus far been carried out by school nutritionists during school meal times, lessons, and grade-specific activities, but no adequately clear-cut guidance system has yet been established, resulting in a wide disparity in the approaches taken by individual communities and schools. Changes in the circumstances surrounding children's diets in recent years, however, have created a greater need to establish effective guidance systems at schools to improve guidance on diet. In light of the January 2004 "Establishment of a Diet Guidance System" recommendations by the Central Council for Education, a bill to establish a diet and nutrition teacher system ("Bill to Partially Amend the School Education Law") was submitted to the 159th Ordinary Session of the Diet, approved and passed unanimously on May 14, 2004 and promulgated on May 21. The diet and nutrition teacher system will be inaugurated in April 2005.

1) Duties of diet and nutrition teachers

Diet and nutrition teachers, with both educational qualifications and nutritional expertise, are responsible for providing guidance on diet and managing school meal programs in an integrated fashion (Figure



1-1-3).

(a) Individual consultations and guidance for schoolchildren

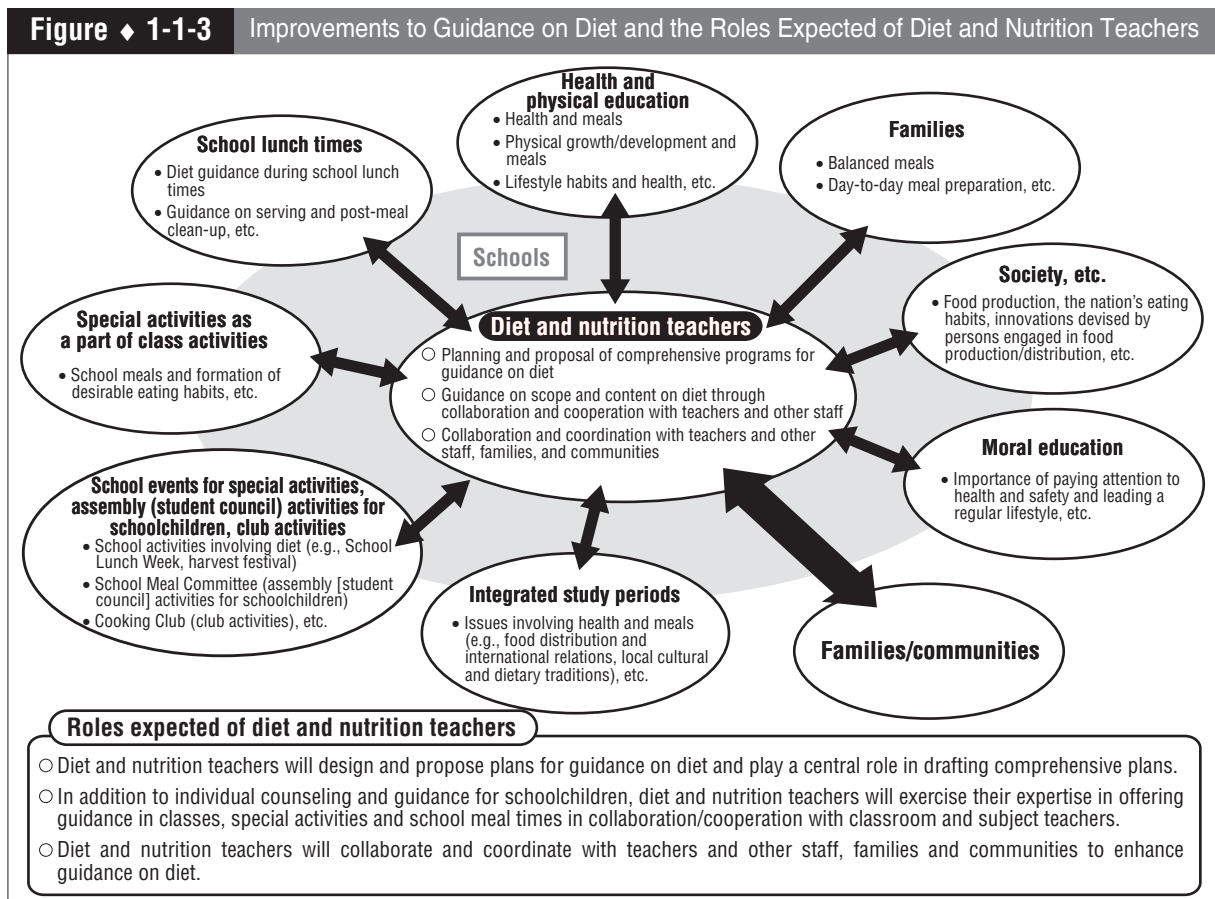
To prevent lifestyle diseases and to respond appropriately to problems faced by individual students such as allergies to food products, diet and nutrition teachers provide in-depth guidance and advice based on their expertise on the eating habits of schoolchildren.

- (Specific examples)
- (a) Providing individual guidance and advice on the impact of an unbalanced diet on health to a schoolchild not eating a balanced diet
 - (b) Making a schoolchild with a tendency toward obesity aware of the need to engage in a suitable level of exercise and to consume a nutritionally balanced diet, and providing anti-obesity guidance
 - (c) Providing schoolchildren with an allergy to a particular food product with school meals not containing the allergen and offering advice on strategies for selecting menu items

In this guidance, diet and nutrition teachers will deal as necessary with issues through suitable cooperation with families, classroom teachers, special education teachers, school doctors/dentists, other nutritional experts, primary physicians and specialist physicians, etc.

(b) Educational guidance for young students during classes and special activities

In addition to individual guidance, guidance on diet is offered throughout school education during school lunches, special activities, lessons, moral education, and integrated study periods, and diet and nutrition teachers are expected to put their expertise to use in active involvement in planning guidance for these times. Diet and nutrition teachers play a core role in providing guidance on diet especially during school meal times, offering guidance not only by using school meals to maximum effect as a teaching tool but also by utilizing the preparation of meals and post-meal clean-up as forums for learning mealtime manners.



(c) Collaboration/coordination of guidance on diet

As mentioned above, school guidance on diet spans a broad range of subjects. For that reason, teachers and other personnel concerned must collaborate and cooperate adequately to provide effective guidance. The diet and nutrition teacher is expected to serve as a cornerstone of collaboration and cooperation between teachers and other staff, playing a central role in the design of comprehensive plans for guidance on diet. Broad collaboration with families and communities in guidance on diet is important, and it is crucial that the diet and nutrition teacher exercise his/her expertise in playing an active role in educational activities through school lunch newsletters, advice to parents and guardians on strategies for meal menus that avoid food product allergens, parent-child cooking classes, and planning of diet-related events hosted by the local community and related organizations. Diet and nutrition teachers thus play an important role as coordinators in effectively promoting food education, ensuring close collaboration between teachers and other staff, parents and guardians and other relevant organizations in activities both in and out of school.

Besides guidance on diet, other important duties of diet and nutrition teachers involving school meal management include nutrition management, sanitation control, food inspection, and commodity management.

By providing guidance on diet and management of school meals as part of their principal duties, for example, diet and nutrition teachers can utilize produce grown in experiential learning or in the local community in school meals to help children gain a realization of the connection between production activities and their day-to-day meals; these efforts can be expected to prove highly synergistic with education.

2) Training diet and nutrition teachers

As described above, diet and nutrition teachers require expertise in both nutrition and teaching to fulfill their professional duties. A diet and nutrition teacher license system was thus established to systemically guarantee these qualifications/skills; only persons having this license may serve as diet and nutrition teachers.

Three classes of license are available for diet and nutrition teachers—Specialist, Class 1, and Class 2—and applicants must, like teachers and special education instructors, pass a prescribed number of classes/credits at a university to obtain a license.

The basic prerequisite for obtaining a Class 1 license, the standard license, is a bachelor's degree, certification as a national registered dietician, or completion of a national registered dietician training course (a dietician license is required). In addition, four credits in "education courses on nutrition" and 18 credits in "courses on teaching responsibilities" (courses on the significance of teaching responsibilities, basic education theory, curricula, student guidance and educational counseling, general training, and practical training in nutrition education) must be obtained from a university approved by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

A system has also been established to allow persons currently working as a school nutritionist to obtain a diet and nutrition teacher license through a teaching proficiency test offered by prefectural boards of education by satisfying the prescribed years of experience as a school nutritionist and obtaining the necessary university credits.

3) Assignment of diet and nutrition teachers

Diet and nutrition teachers are assigned at the discretion of local governments and, with the start of the new system in April 2005, prefectural boards of education will hire and assign persons holding diet and nutrition teacher licenses as diet and nutrition teachers at public elementary and junior high schools in accordance with the needs of communities.

(2) Improvements to Meal Content and Dining Environment

1) School lunch programs at present

School lunch programs contribute to the formation of correct eating habits by providing nutritionally bal-

anced meals. School lunches also have major educational significance as a forum for guidance on diet and communication between teachers and schoolchildren and as opportunities for encouraging positive interpersonal relations among schoolchildren. As of May 2003, approximately 10.43 million young students nationwide were receiving school meals (**Figure 1-1-4**).

Figure 1-1-4 School Lunch Program Participation Rate
(as a Percentage of All Kindergarteners and Schoolchildren)

(as of May 1, 2003)

School	Participation rate (as a percentage of all kindergarteners and schoolchildren)			
	Full school meal program	Supplemental school meal program	Milk program	Total
Elementary schools	98.7%	0.3%	0.4%	99.4% (7,180,600 students)
Junior high schools	69.0%	0.4%	13.1%	82.5% (3,094,031 students)
Special education schools	88.5%	0.0%	1.6%	90.1% (86,922 students)
Evening high schools	42.5%	19.0%	0.5%	61.9% (68,405 students)
Total	88.1%	0.5%	4.7%	93.2% (10,429,958 students)

(Note) Full school meal program: bread/rice, milk and side dishes are provided
 Supplemental school meal program: meals other than full school meals; milk and side dishes are provided
 Milk program: only milk is provided
 Junior high schools here include first-term secondary schools.
 (Source) Surveyed by MEXT

2) Improvements to Meal Content and Dining Environment

Schools have sought in the past several years to bring greater variety to the meals offered at school by, for example, utilizing local produce as ingredients in school meals and putting local cuisine on the menu. Utilizing local produce in school meals is valuable educationally in getting schoolchildren to take an interest in the food production and culture of their communities, and MEXT promotes the use of local produce in instructors' manuals on school meal guidance and in learning materials on eating habits designed for students. Efforts are also being made to improve dining environments by upgrading school cafeterias.

Given the educational significance of having schoolchildren acquire the desirable habit of regularly eating rice, the traditional staple of the Japanese diet, MEXT is encouraging schools to make rice-based school lunches a regular feature (an average of 2.9 times per week in FY2003) and contributing to greater variety in school meals. Bearing in mind the information provided in the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Labour's "Japanese Nutritional Requirements—Meal Consumption Standards" and the changes in family eating habits in recent years, MEXT adjusted its average daily nutritional requirement standards for schoolchildren in May 2003 and has been working to improve the content of school meals.

3) Enhancing health management systems

There have not been any incidents of enterohemorrhagic *Escherichia coli* O-157 food poisoning in school lunches since 1997, but continuing incidents of food poisoning due to other causes mandates thoroughgoing health management.

MEXT has been offering guidance on facilities/equipment and cooking processes and seeking to improve and enhance facilities by, say, introducing a cooking system (dry system) that uses dry floors to check the growth of bacteria in humid conditions. To address recent concerns about school meals, MEXT revised its School Meal Health Management Standards in March 2003 to ensure appropriate temperature control for food products and thoroughgoing health management by persons involved in preparing and serving school meals, and to further improve/enhance health management in school lunch programs. MEXT has also upgraded health management efforts through training sessions and conferences for school nutritionists.

(3) Promoting Food Education

MEXT has sponsored symposiums to promote food education and, since FY2001, has been distributing learning materials on eating habits to 1st graders, 5th graders and 7th graders nationwide. MEXT supported food education in a variety of other ways in FY2004, such as by preparing guidance/educational pam-

phlets on diet and implementing model projects to promote food education mainly at schools.

2 Dealing with New Mental and Physical Health Problems

Recent years have seen the emergence of new problems, including mental health problems among schoolchildren, adolescent drug abuse, communicable diseases, the “sick house syndrome,” and allergies.

In view of these problems, schools are asked to provide health management appropriate to the health issues facing individual schoolchildren in cooperation with local communities and families in order to foster a rich spirit and a sound body.

(1) Dealing with Mental Health Problems

1) Guidance in classes

Schools have long offered guidance in physical education and health and physical education classes on mental development, the correlation between mind and body, and self-awareness in order to nurture balanced mental and physical development.

There has been a growing need in the past few years, however, to improve guidance on the mental health issues currently facing schoolchildren, including the growing seriousness of truancy, bullying, violence, and drug abuse and increased anxiety and stress among students. The present Learning Guidance Guidelines therefore provide for better guidance on coping with anxiety, worries, stress and other mental health issues, modified as necessary to suit differing stages of development among schoolchildren.

2) Improving health counseling

A rising number of students in recent years have complained of difficulties in learning, problems in getting along with friends and family, and such symptoms as psychogenic abdominal pains and anxiety stemming from these issues. Natural disasters and other major incidents/accidents have increased the need for cooperation among special education instructors, classroom teachers, school physicians, school counselors and other school staff in providing appropriate mental care to schoolchildren.

By focusing attention on the background to the physical disabilities of schoolchildren, special education instructors are in a position to notice various signals sent by children, and health counseling by special education instructors has become increasingly important. Accordingly, MEXT holds training sessions for special education instructors in an effort to improve their qualifications.

Moreover, from FY2004 liaison councils have organized in each prefecture to ensure that health counseling can be smoothly administered in cooperation with community health care organizations, medical specialists are being dispatched to schools with the collaboration of medical institutions, and model projects are being implemented to address the various health problems of schoolchildren.

The past several years have seen numerous natural disasters as well as man-made disasters. Therefore, the “Mental Care of Children during Emergencies/Disasters,” a guidance manual for teachers prepared in FY1997, was revised in August 2003 to address such problems as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that might affect the mental health of schoolchildren.

(2) Enhancing Drug Abuse Prevention Education

Although there has been a downward trend in drug abuse among adolescents since 1996-1997, when more than 200 junior-high and high school students were referred to prosecutors on drug-related charges, the situation is still unpredictable; in 2003, more than 700 junior-high and high school students were turned over to prosecutors on charges of thinner abuse and other such offenses. The Japanese government has set up a Headquarters for the Promotion of Measures to Prevent Drug Abuse headed by the prime minister himself; at the expiration of its “Five-Year Strategy to Prevent Drug Abuse” (May 1998), the Headquarters drew up a “New Five-Year Strategy to Prevent Drug Abuse” in July 2003 and measures have since been carried out government-wide.

Endeavoring to offer annual drug abuse prevention classes in all junior high and high schools and to tackle

drug abuse hand in hand with local communities, MEXT provides guidance to prefectural boards of education. MEXT has also prepared and distributed educational materials to schoolchildren, engaged in publicity and educational activities utilizing large-screen displays at sports fields, launched a website (<http://www.hokenkai.co.jp/3/3-1/3-1.html>) and worked to improve drug abuse prevention education.

A survey on smoking conducted by MEXT shows that schoolchildren continue to have a significant interest in smoking, despite the fact that many of them are aware of the harmful health effects of smoking. Interest in drinking is on the rise and, in general, the younger the student, the less informed he/she was of the harmful health effects of alcohol consumption. Schools need to improve their smoking/drinking prevention education.

In the context of school education, MEXT is preparing educational materials on smoking prevention for schoolchildren to encourage them early on to adopt an attitude that keeps them from smoking.

(3) Enhancing Sex Education

Sex education at schools is grounded on respect for human dignity and seeks to provide schoolchildren with scientific knowledge about sex suited to their stage of development and to help them acquire the ability to think and judge for themselves so that they make desirable choices accordingly. In offering sex education, it is necessary to ensure that (1) the content is suitable for the students' stage of development, (2) the content is of educational value, and (3) the content is acceptable to families and communities.

The content of guidance was enhanced in the present Learning Guidance Guidelines: elementary school physical education classes from the 4th grade are to provide guidance on the growth and development of schoolchildren within a health context, and health and physical education classes at junior high school are specifically instructed to begin offering guidance on AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

MEXT has also been pursuing such measures as (1) preparing AIDS educational materials for elementary, junior high and high school students, (2) holding symposiums for teachers and other staff, and (3) conducting practical research in order to promote AIDS education and sex education in communities.

(4) Enhancing Measures to Combat Communicable Disease

Tuberculosis group infections at schools, EEC O-157 food poisoning, and outbreaks of influenza and rubella have made the news in recent years. In addition to concerns about STDs among the younger generations, new communicable diseases such as SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and highly pathogenic avian influenza have emerged as new hazards that must be addressed promptly. MEXT has worked in cooperation with other ministries and agencies to provide prefectural boards of education with up-to-date information and compiled lists of points for schools to consider in responding to these risks.

MEXT has distributed pamphlets on school countermeasures against tuberculosis to all 7th and 9th graders, and distributed reference materials on STD prevention to high school teachers to better combat communicable diseases at schools.

(5) Dealing with Hygiene Problems in the School Environment

The increasing airtightness of housing and the use of construction and interior finishing materials that release chemical substances have given rise in recent years to indoor air contamination and consequent health difficulties for residents (the "sick house syndrome").

In light of the results of on-site research on indoor airborne contamination in schools, MEXT in February 2002 revised its School Environment Health Standards, guidelines for maintaining a healthy school environment. Inspections of indoor air density of formaldehyde and three other substances (styrene was one of two substances added in February 2004) were incorporated, and guidance has been provided on circulation and other appropriate follow-up measures to be taken when densities exceed certain levels.

(6) Allergy Countermeasures at Schools

Atopic dermatitis and other allergies have become problematic among schoolchildren in recent years, and school responses have assumed greater importance.

In cooperation with such organizations as the Japanese Society of School Health, MEXT has prepared pamphlets for teachers and other staff who provide a useful summary of accurate information and note the key points for guidance on asthma so that teachers and other school personnel will be correctly informed on allergies and can properly assist schoolchildren suffering from allergies. Pamphlets have also been prepared for teachers that offer an overview of the symptoms of atopic dermatitis and points requiring attention so that teachers will have accurate information on hand and be able to respond appropriately.

Furthermore, in FY2004 MEXT organized a survey research team of specialists to conduct research on allergies among schoolchildren so that MEXT can then consider and implement measures to support school efforts to combat allergies.

Part 3

Creating a Sound Environment to Nurture/Protect Children – Community Approaches

1 Promoting a New Children's Plan

The June 1999 report “Daily-life and Nature-based Experiences Nurture the Hearts of Japan's Children” compiled by the Lifelong Learning Council noted the importance of providing children with opportunities for a variety of experiences involving interactions with friends of differing ages and others in the community to foster in children a “zest for living.”

Taking these recommendations to heart and working toward the introduction of a five-day school week at all schools from FY2002, MEXT drafted a “National Children's Plan (Emergency Three-Year Strategy)” from FY1999 to help establish community environments that would nurture children and to develop systems to promote the activities of parents and children. In cooperation with other ministries and agencies, MEXT has been increasing the opportunities and sites for hands-on activities for children, among other efforts.

With the five-day school week fully in place, a New Children's Plan was drafted in FY2002 in view of the results achieved to that point; the following measures continued to be pursued in FY2004 (**Figure 1-1-15**).

- Ensuring safe and secure activity spots where children can engage in sports, cultural and other activities at school after school hours and on holidays, and establishing systems to encourage volunteer and experiential activities for children both in and out of school
- Expanding the opportunities and sites for children-centered community activities through support for joint projects in collaboration with the Ministry of the Environment, etc., and for children's activities on weekends with the cooperation of local residents
- Improving the qualifications of parenting supporters in communities and otherwise supporting home education

2 Ensuring Safe and Secure Activity Areas for Children

The past several years have seen a great many crimes involving adolescents, frequently including crimes almost unheard of even in adult society. With ever-younger offenders committing vicious crimes, this behavior poses a threat to the safety and security of society as a whole.

Although it is difficult to speak in sweeping generalities, as a thorough understanding of the facts and expert analysis of the circumstances and background are needed in individual incidents, it can generally be concluded that the decline in the educational functions of families and communities can be found at the root of misconduct involving children.

Enhancing the educational functions of families, communities and schools and creating an environment so that these educational functions can be consolidated is important for the sound development of children.

Figure 1-1-5 New Children's Plan (principal measures for FY2004)

Overview of program

With the full introduction of a five-day school week from FY2002, the New Children's Plan was drafted in consideration of the results achieved in the period FY1999-FY2001 by the National Children's Plan (Emergency Three-Year Strategy), which sought to establish environments that nurture children in local communities. The New Children's Plan was designed to promote measures in cooperation with other ministries and agencies that help continually expand children's opportunities to participate in hands-on activities.

<p>Developing systems and providing information for community hands-on activities</p>	<p>Expanding opportunities and sites for children-centered community activities</p>	<p>Enhancing counseling system for home education and providing learning opportunities</p>
<p>Developing systems to strengthen community educational functions and hands-on activities</p> <p><National level></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Experiential and Volunteer Activity Promotion Council • National Experiential and Volunteer Activity Promotion Center <p><Prefectural, city, town, and village level></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Educational Function and Experiential Activity Promotion Council • Experiential and Volunteer Activity Support Center 	<p>Programs to promote "classrooms for children in local communities" (new)</p> <p>For the development of children with strong and well-rounded characters, who will create Japan's future through support from society at large, utilizing schools, etc. to provide children with spaces (activity centers), where the educational functions of local adults will be concentrated and safety managers and activity advisors will be assigned to support children in conducting various hands-on activities and making exchanges with local residents, including sports and cultural activities after school or on weekends</p>	<p>Implementing the General Program to support and promote home education (new)</p> <p>Promoting the training of instructors to improve the qualifications of parenting supporters and to support home education, the starting point for all education, and utilizing a variety of occasions to provide parents with home education learning opportunities</p>
<p>Programs to improve children's physical fitness (expanded)</p> <p>Devising comprehensive measures to improve children's physical fitness, including practical activities aimed at improving the physical fitness of children and encouraging children to form desirable lifestyle habits through cooperation between families, schools and communities</p>	<p>Programs to promote extended foreign-language experiential activities</p> <p>These programs cultivate children's foreign-language communication skills through communal living with native speakers, and offer training to enable participants to meet the challenges of internationalization</p>	<p>Preparing/distributing new Pocketbooks for home education</p> <p>Continuing to prepare and distribute new home education handbooks to encourage parents to take another look at their families and enable them to tackle parenting with confidence</p>
<p>Children's Channel</p> <p>Offering participatory programs for children nationwide by utilizing two-way satellite communications facilities (L-Net) in libraries, community centers, museums and other locations around the country where children gather on Saturdays when school is out</p>	<p>University Junior Science Program</p> <p>Making greater use of universities and other institutions of higher learning to instill in children curiosity and interest about science and technology, and offering experiential lectures that motivate students</p>	<p>Hosting National Home Education Forums (new)</p> <p>Hosting forums in two regions to stimulate discussion nationwide on supporting home education and increasing the momentum for action</p>
<p>Producing TV science programs</p> <p>Producing TV science programs and making them available through CS broadcasts to introduce science, technology and related topics in an easily understandable fashion</p>	<p>Programs to promote extended outdoor and nature experiences for youths</p> <p>Organizing groups of youths from different grades for extended two-week nature-based experiential activities, primarily during summer vacation, at outdoor activity facilities and farm houses</p>	
	<p>National youth education facilities</p> <p>Providing opportunities and sites for a variety of activities such as communal living in a rich natural environment and nature-based experiences at national youth education facilities</p>	
	<p>Children's Dream Fund</p> <p>Subsidizing experiential and reading activities conducted by private organizations</p>	
<p>Increasing opportunities for children to enjoy sports</p> <p>Fostering and establishing comprehensive community sports clubs based in familiar school and community sports facilities that enable local residents, including children, to regularly engage in sports activities, and supporting wide-area sports centers to provide support to these facilities</p>	<p>Children's classes in traditional culture</p> <p>Offering opportunities for systematically and regularly experiencing and learning the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, Japanese dance, traditional music, and local handicrafts at schools and cultural facilities on Saturdays and Sundays</p>	
<p>Promoting experiential-type environmental learning for children in cooperation with other ministries</p> <p>Implementing, in cooperation with other ministries and agencies, programs in which children themselves plan and carry out regular experiential activities focused on the familiar community environment</p>	<p>Supporting cultural experience programs</p> <p>Providing opportunities for children to interact with and experience other cultures in a variety of settings</p>	

Given the growing seriousness of this problem behavior by adolescents and the decline in community and family educational functions, MEXT drafted a “New Plan for Creating Spaces for Children” that asks families, communities and schools around the country to work as one to ensure “safe and secure activity spots for children” so that they can engage in sports, cultural and a wide range of other activities after classes and on holidays at schools with the cooperation of adults in the communities; this Plan went into effect in FY2004.

This Plan seeks to promote sound development in children by mobilizing the adults in communities to watch over children and to create spaces for children to engage in various activities.

More specifically, MEXT is urgently and systematically pursuing the program to promote “classrooms for children in local communities” that offer safe and secure experiential activities and community exchange activities available to all elementary and junior high students in a three-year plan (to be implemented at approximately 5,300 locations in FY2004). In addition to parallel efforts to enhance home education counseling systems and to provide learning opportunities, MEXT is developing support teams to help children become more self-reliant as a means of addressing problem behavior and truancy.

(1) Implementing the Program to Promote “Classrooms for Children in Local Communities” Projects

1) Establishing steering councils at the prefectural level

Steering councils are being set up in every prefecture to consider approaches for creating spaces for children within the prefecture, to host workshops for coordinators, to carry out activities to heighten public awareness of the need to create spaces for children, to examine safety measures, and to verify and evaluate projects after implementation.

2) Developing the program to promote “classrooms for children in local communities” (see Column 3)

Activity spots for children to engage in activities safely and securely are being set up after classes, on weekends and during extended vacation periods using school grounds, classrooms and community halls, and adults in the community, retired teachers, university students, and persons from youth/social education organizations are being assigned as safety managers and activity advisors.



▲ Playing *menko* with community adults

A variety of experiential activities are being arranged for elementary and junior high school students, including such traditional pastimes as soccer, baseball and other sports, reading, musical performance, *taketonbo* and *menko*, English conversation classes held by guest native speakers, and experiences in the community’s traditional culture. These activities are expected to prove very beneficial, offering children opportunities to interact not only with classmates from school

Column

3

Waku Waku Challenge Plaza (Katsushika Ward, Tokyo)

After classes and on Saturdays, summer vacation and other days that schools are not in session, children from different grades come together in school gymnasiums, school grounds, and special classrooms to play freely and to engage in sports and learning activities. Activities are held from the end of classes to 6:00 p.m. on weekdays, and from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on non-school days.

Persons from the community serve as child guidance supporters to instruct and watch over children, and they put their respective skills to use in teaching children sports such as badminton and dodgeball as well as handicrafts and English conversation.



▲ Children enjoying a game of go

but also with others in the community, to learn naturally how to get along with people and become familiar with social rules, and to improve their ability to assert their own ideas.

With adults of the community participating as volunteers, it can also be expected that children will actively interact with local adults not only in “classrooms for children in local communities” but on a day-to-day basis as well.

3) Assigning coordinators for creating spaces for children

Coordinators are assigned at the city/town/village level and the personnel needed for “classrooms for children in local communities” are secured/registered by calling on parents to participate and by collaborating with schools and other organizations. Programs in which children play an active part are being planned in cooperation with steering councils.

(2) Safety Measures in “Classrooms for Children in Local Communities”

To encourage individual schools to take more concrete steps to ensure security, MEXT in January 2004 published “An Urgent Appeal on School Safety” (see Section 4 [3] of this chapter). Alongside this, MEXT organized a collaborators conference for the program to promote “classrooms for children in local communities” and prepared a “Safety Management Manual for the program to promote “classrooms for children in local communities” (May 2004). This manual provides a summary of points of concern regarding health management, measures to prevent entry by suspicious persons, disaster countermeasures, and crisis management policies for facilities and their immediate vicinities so that safe and secure activity spots can be created for children. The manual primarily focuses on the basics for implementing projects, given that “classrooms for children in local communities” will be established in differing locations and formats nationwide, and communities are encouraged to refer to this manual while devising approaches and developing their own manuals.

(3) Pursuing Campaigns to Create Spaces for Children

MEXT has launched a “Creating Spaces for Children” campaign, setting up a “Office to Promote the Creation of Spaces for Children” in the Lifelong Learning Policy Bureau in September 2003. This Office drafts campaign plans, contacts and coordinates with local governments and other organizations, and oversees the activities of a promotion committee and a liaison conference.

Forming a support group made up of prominent figures from all circles of society and providing press releases to all types of media are among the publicity activities carried out for this campaign. MEXT has also been calling on people to join in this campaign and encouraging use of the campaign’s symbol mark (website: “Creating Spaces for Children” <http://www.ibasyo.com>).



▲ Symbol mark for the Creating Children's Spaces Campaign

3 Promoting Volunteer/Experiential Activities

(1) Education to Nurture Spiritually Rich Japanese Citizens — Importance of Volunteer and Experiential Activities

Close community ties in Japan have undergone change in recent years in the wake of family nuclearization, a declining birthrate, and urbanization, and the weakening connections between individuals and communities have made it difficult to come up with suitable solutions to a variety of issues confronting local communities. To foster socialization, well-rounded character and consideration for others in adolescents in the face of such circumstances, one meaningful approach is to enhance their opportunities to participate in volunteer and experiential activities suited to their stage of development.

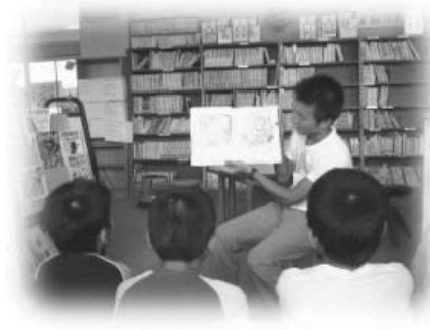
The importance of volunteer activities from this perspective was stressed in the December 2000 Report of the National Conference on Educational Reform. The Central Council of Education’s July 2002 recom-

recommendations (“Measures to Promote Volunteer and Experiential Activities Among Youth”) and March 2003 recommendations (“A Basic Education Law and a Basic Plan to Promote Education Suited to a New Age”) noted the importance of cultivating awareness of and willingness to participate in a new “public,” pointed out the significance of volunteer and experiential activities in that regard, and suggested measures to promote such activities. Bearing in mind these recommendations and reports, MEXT in January 2001 drafted a 21st Century Education Revitalization Plan offering an overall perspective on approaches to future educational reform and addressing major measures and issues. MEXT has been pursuing a full range of measures in line with this Plan, including boosting volunteer and experiential activities, upgrading moral education and experiential activities at schools (see Part 4 of this Chapter), and improving nature-based experience activities for youth (see Part 3 [5] of this Chapter).

(2) Measures to Promote Volunteer/Experiential Activities

The School Education Law and the Social Education Law were amended in July 2001 with the clear intent of enhancing experiential activities such as volunteer activities and other public service experiential activities.

The “Program to Promote Volunteer and Experiential Activities in Cooperation with Communities and Schools” was launched in FY2000, and the following measures have been taken to expand substantially the opportunities for children to engage in volunteer and experiential activities.



▲ University student volunteer at a story-telling session

1) Establishing and enhancing systems for promoting volunteer and experiential activities

Prefectures, cities, towns and villages are organizing “councils” to seek cooperation with a broad range of organizations and groups, and these councils are working to establish and enhance systems to promote youth volunteer/experiential activities by providing information on groups that offer volunteer/experiential activities and setting up “support centers” that coordinate between schools/individuals and organizations hosting activities. In FY2003 councils were organized in 1,126 cities, towns and villages and support centers in 1,194 cities, towns and villages.

The national government has in this regard organized a National Volunteer/Experiential Activities Promotion Council comprising the Ministry of Health, Labour and welfare, the Cabinet Office, other ministries and agencies and relevant organizations nationwide, and set up a National Experiential and Volunteer Activity Promotion Center within the National Institute for Educational Policy Research’s Social Education Practical Research Center to collect information on volunteer/experiential activities, present case studies and provide activity support to prefectures, cities, towns and villages.

An “FY2003 Volunteer and Experiential Activity Managers Conference” was held in October 2003 for prefectural and government-designated city board of education members involved in social and school education; information and opinions were exchanged to enhance activities through cooperation between communities and schools.

2) Implementing model programs to promote experiential activities tailored to community circumstances

Programs that serve as models to encourage approaches suited to local circumstances have been carried out primarily at community learning sites such as schools, social education facilities and sports facilities with the cooperation of university students and sports instructors; these programs support experiential activities for children after classes and on weekends and wide-ranging intergenerational exchange between the elderly and children.

In FY2003 789 communities carried out model programs designed to revitalize community educational functions and 246 communities implemented model programs to jump-start after-school sports activities for children, with the aim being a nationwide expansion of sites for children’s activities utilizing local resources.

3) Fostering public spirit

To foster public spirit and encourage greater participation in volunteer activities, MEXT held a “National Forum on Promoting Volunteer/Experiential Activities” in March 2004.

The Forum comprised a symposium and exhibition events. The forum featured a keynote address by Mamoru Mori (astronaut and Executive Director of the Japan Miraikan) and panel discussions on expanding volunteer activities in communities, at workplaces, and at schools. Yuko Arimori (marathon runner) also gave a talk, and volunteer groups set up booth displays at the exhibition event.



▲ Mamoru Mori making keynote address at national forum

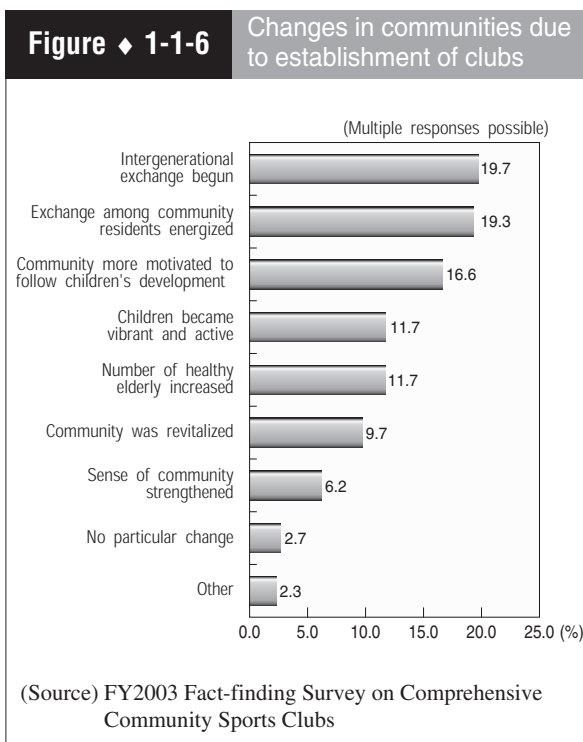
Furthermore, two survey research projects were conducted in FY2003 to examine specific measures for promoting volunteer/experiential activities: “Measures for Utilizing Volunteer Passports and Other Tools to Encourage and Support Volunteer Activities” and “Survey Research on Fostering Public Spirit to Promote Volunteer Activities.”

4 Improving Community Educational Functions through Sports Activities

Sports stimulate the sound development of mind and body, foster self-control and self-responsibility, and teach the spirit of fair play. As cultivating communication skills and consideration for others through interaction with friends and instructors plays an important role in the sound development of youth, environments in which children can enjoy sports casually as part of their day-to-day lives are needed. The principal approaches now being pursued by communities to promote children’s sports activities include the following.

(1) Comprehensive Community Sports Clubs

MEXT is promoting the development of “comprehensive community sports clubs” that enable both children and adults who love sports to participate in sports in accordance with their respective tastes and skill levels; these clubs are run voluntarily and independently by local residents (see Part 2, Chapter 2). Comprehensive community sports clubs not only play a key role as locations for children’s sports activities after classes and on weekends, but also prove beneficial by fostering the sound development of youth and revitalizing community educational functions through interaction with family members and intergenerational exchange via sports, as family members and community residents of all ages participate. Numerous instances have shown that organizing comprehensive community sports clubs motivates communities as a whole to follow the development of their children and produces more vibrant and active children (Figure 1-1-6).



As of July 2004, 1,117 comprehensive community sports clubs had been created in 702 cities, towns and villages nationwide, and even greater expansion of such clubs is needed in future.

(2) Youth Sports Associations

Youth sports associations were first established in 1962 by the Japan Amateur Sports Association for the purpose of promoting the sound development of youth through sports. These associations have since been

organized nationwide, with approximately 35,000 such associations consisting of about 930,000 members (primarily elementary school students) active in communities.

Youth sports associations may be of the single-sport variety (e.g., rubber baseball, soccer, volleyball or kendo) or a multiple-sport organization, and their activities utilize schools and public facilities (Figure 1-1-7). Besides sports activities, these associations allow members to participate in outdoor and cultural activities, local projects and events, and volunteer and other social activities. Particular emphasis has been placed on social activities in local communities that form the foundations on which the associations are built, and these activities have come to have great significance as key experiential activities that help young girls and boys become respectable members of society.

Figure 1-1-7

Youth sports associations: composition by sport/activity

Sport/activity	Number of associations (percentage)
1. Rubber baseball	6,896 (19.4%)
2. Multiple-sport	5,207 (14.7%)
3. Soccer	4,786 (13.5%)
4. Volleyball	3,398 (9.6%)
5. Kendo	3,390 (9.6%)
6. Basketball	2,905 (8.2%)
7. Karate	1,868 (5.3%)
8. Softball	1,258 (3.5%)
9. Judo	1,230 (3.5%)
10. Table tennis	684 (1.9%)
11. Other (52 categories)	3,847 (10.8%)

(Source) FY2003 survey by Japan Amateur Sports Association

5 Sound Development of Youth

In the face of progressing computerization and other remarkable changes in the circumstances surrounding children, promoting the sound mental and physical development of young people and fostering in them well-rounded characters and moral/ethical values have been vital issues in nurturing youth who have dreams and goals for the future and who can actively take the steps necessary to create a prosperous society.

The Headquarters for Youth Development* set up in December 2003 summarized the government's basic philosophy on nurturing youth and the medium- to long-term direction of measures in the areas of health, welfare, education, labor and delinquent behavior to this end in the "National Youth Development Policy." Focused on the 0-30 age group, it incorporated the fundamental concepts underlying measures to nurture youth, the basic direction of measures for separate age groups (infancy, elementary school age, puberty, and adolescence), and the basic direction of measures for dealing with delinquent youth and other young people in special situations.

MEXT is currently pursuing the measures below for the sound development of youth in close cooperation with other ministries and agencies.

(1) Enhancing Experiential Activities for Youth

It has become clearer than ever that the more daily-life and nature-based experiences a child has, the more likely he/she is to have developed moral and ethical values. The December 2000 Report of the National Council on Educational Reform recommended expanding nature-based experiential activities and other experiential learning. On this basis, MEXT drafted the Education Reform Plan for the 21st Century in January 2001 and took advantage of the full introduction of the five-day school week from FY2002 to put together a New Children's Plan to promote measures in cooperation with other ministries and agencies aimed at continually enhancing children's opportunities to participate in experiential activities.

1) Promoting experiential activities through various programs

- (a) Programs to promote environmental learning through experiential activities by children in collaboration with other ministries and agencies

* Headquarters for Youth Development

Established within the Cabinet Office and headed by the Prime Minister, this Headquarters ensures close contact between administrative organs concerned with youth development and seeks to promote comprehensively and effectively measures to foster the younger generations that will one day be the mainstay of society.

To help children develop well-rounded characters, MEXT in cooperation with other ministries and agencies has entrusted local public organizations to carry out projects offering regular experiential learning planned by children themselves and has been promoting environmental learning through experiential activities.

These activities take place in such venues as rivers (in cooperation with the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport and the Ministry of the Environment), fishing ports (in cooperation with the Fisheries Agency), agricultural waterways (in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries), forests (in cooperation with the Forestry Agency), companies and shopping streets (in cooperation with the Small and Medium Enterprise Agency), and National parks (in cooperation with the Ministry of the Environment) suited to experiential activities and through exchange with cities and farm villages (in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries).

(b) Expanding locations for children's experiential activities in cooperation with other ministries and agencies

MEXT is implementing the following approaches in cooperation with other ministries and agencies to expand the locations available for children's experiential activities.

(i) Children's Waterside Rediscovery Program (in cooperation with the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport and the Ministry of the Environment)

To enable children to enjoy rivers and to provide them with experiences in which they "learn from rivers," boards of education, river bureaus, environmental bureaus and citizen groups cooperate in selecting and registering rivers that can serve as "children's waterside," promoting the use of rivers by children and making improvements as needed to enhance children's experiential activities.

(ii) Rice Paddy Paths and Babbling Brooks Promotion Program (in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries)

To enable children to enjoy and deepen their understanding of farm villages, boards of education and farm administration bureaus cooperate in selecting and registering farm waterways that can be used by children as "rice paddy paths and babbling brooks," in promoting children's use of rice paddies and farm waterways and in making improvements as needed to enhance children's experiential activities involving farming and farm villages.

(iii) Children's Marine Products Industry Interaction Promotion Program (in cooperation with the Fisheries Agency)

To enable children to enjoy fishing ports and deepen their understanding of the fisheries industry, boards of education and fisheries bureaus cooperate in selecting and registering fishing ports that can be used by children as "seas for children," in promoting children's use of fishing ports and in making improvements as needed to enhance children's experiential activities involving the fisheries industry and fishing villages.

(iv) "Children of the Sea" Beach Construction Program (in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport)

To enable children to enjoy safe outdoor and nature experiences at beaches, boards of education and coastline managers cooperate in enhancing experiential activities at beaches by promoting the construction of environmentally-friendly and easy-to-use beaches.

(v) "Children of the Forest" Club Activity Promotion Program (in cooperation with the Forestry Agency)

Boards of education and general forestry facilities cooperate in providing children with a broad range of experiential activities in forests – forestation activities such as planting trees and cutting away underbrush as well as experiences in building wooden structures and making charcoal – through which children can learn more about the connections between people's day-to-day lives and the environment/forests.

(c) Programs to promote extended outdoor and nature experiences for youth

To popularize and firmly establish extended nature-based experiences for youth, MEXT in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has been providing subsidies for programs run by local public organizations that offer outdoor and nature experiences taking advantage of local conditions – camping, mountain climbing and other outdoor activities – and featuring communal living by

various age groups in outdoor activity facilities and farm houses for an extended period of about two weeks.

- (d) Comprehensive programs to promote experiential activities that foster the sociality of youth – programs to promote experiential activities for troubled children

MEXT has been entrusting to local public organizations the implementation of programs that provide outdoor and nature experiences, daily-life and other experiential activities for troubled youth, especially children who refuse to go to school and lock themselves away indoors, and has been promoting experiential activities that foster the sociality of youth.

- (e) Support for common registration system for instructors of outdoor and nature experiences

Established in cooperation with youth organizations and other private groups, the Specified Non-Profit Organization Nature-based Experiential Activity Promotion Council has created a common curriculum and registration system for organizations offering training for instructors of outdoor and nature experiences to promote such training and ensure the public credibility of these instructors, and MEXT has given its support to advancing these efforts.

- (f) The Children's Dream Fund

The Children's Dream Fund established by the National Olympics Memorial Youth Center subsidizes experiential and reading activities carried out by private groups for the sound development of children, and hosts forums to promote children's reading activities to inform and educate the public. Programs being subsidized include the following:

- (i) Activities to promote children's experiential activities

With a particular focus on activities that broaden the scope of approaches to promote children's experiential activities as well as unique new activities, the Fund subsidizes outdoor and nature experiences, social volunteer, science, exchange, and other experiential activities for children and forums to discuss research in this area.

- (ii) Activities to promote children's reading activities

With a particular focus on activities that broaden the scope of approaches to promote children's reading activities as well as unique new activities, the Fund subsidizes regular book club activities for children and information exchanges/joint workshops conducted by networking resident groups.

- (iii) Activities to develop and popularize educational materials for children available on the Internet

The Fund subsidizes activities to develop and popularize digital educational materials available to children via the Internet that support and supplement children's experiential and reading activities.

2) Promoting the activities of youth organizations

Youth organizations conduct a variety of learning, volunteer and sports/cultural activities, and these activities, in particular outdoor and nature experiences and international exchange activities, have in recent years seen considerable expansion.

To encourage the activities of youth organizations, MEXT provides training sessions for group instructors in the National Olympics Memorial Youth Center and subsidizes research discussion meetings, social volunteer activities, international exchanges and other programs carried out by youth organizations nationwide that are acknowledged to contribute significantly to the sound development of youth.

MEXT is also implementing its "Children's 'Emotional Education' National Action Plan" that entrusts to youth organizations nationwide, in accordance with their respective characters, publicity and educational activities across the country aimed at establishing a social environment to help youth grow up strong and spiritually rich.

3) Promoting activities utilizing youth education facilities

Set up principally to foster the sound development of youth, youth education facilities offer youth experiential activities and other educational programs voluntary activities by youth, and provides youth with opportunities to participate in various experiential activities.

The National Olympics Memorial Youth Center, as a core facility (national center) for youth education in

Japan, organizes nationwide research conferences and international exchange projects on youth education, subsidizes youth organizations and survey research projects covering youth education, and informs persons involved in youth education of the results of its efforts.

National Youth Houses and National Children's Centers develop education programs and model projects suited to different stages of development among youth and publicize the achievements of these programs/projects, and play key roles in coordinating between public youth education facilities (718 locations nationwide as of October 2002) and other organizations.



▲ Experiential activity at National Kibi Children's Center (outdoor cooking)



▲ Experiential activity at National Nasu Kashi Youth Nature Center (experience at the headwaters of the Abukuma River)

(2) Promoting Children's Reading Activities

It has been noted that today's children have been increasingly remote from the printed word as information media such as television, video and the Internet take hold, as the living environment of children changes, and as children no longer acquire from infancy the habit of reading.

The School Reading Survey* conducted in May 2004 revealed that the average number of books read by schoolchildren per month was 7.7 in elementary schools, 3.3 in junior high schools and 1.8 in high schools; 7.0% of students in elementary schools, 18.8% in junior high schools and 42.6% in high schools did not even read one book per month.

Reading activities help children learn language, heighten their sensitivities, improve their ability to express themselves, and enrich their creativity, and are thus essential to enabling them to develop a deeper zest for living; it is extremely important, therefore, to encourage such activities throughout Japanese society as a whole.

The lawmaker-initiated Law on the Promotion of Children's Reading Activities, designed to promote children's reading activities, was passed, promulgated and put into force in December 2001. This law sought to have measures for promoting children's reading activities comprehensively and systematically. It defined the basic philosophy underlying the promotion of children's reading activities, made clear the responsibilities of the national and local governments in this regard, expected the national government to draft and publish the Basic Plan for the Promotion of Children's Reading Activities, local governments to draft and publish the Basic Plan on Measures for the Promotion of Children's Reading Activities, and designated April 23 Children's Reading Day.

In accordance with the provisions of this Law, the Basic Plan for the Promotion of Children's Reading Activities was approved by the cabinet in August 2002. This Plan established the basic direction for measures over a five-year span from FY2002 to FY2006 and laid out specific strategies. An outline of the Plan is given below.

* School Reading Survey

Conducted each year jointly by the National School Library Association and the Mainichi Shimbun Company, this survey examines the popularity of reading among schoolchildren in elementary, junior high and high schools nationwide (the May 2004 survey was the 50th such survey).

Outline of Basic Plan for the Promotion of Children's Reading Activities

1. Providing opportunities through families, communities and schools for children to enjoy reading
 - Using home education learning opportunities to help parents understand the importance of reading
 - Promoting children's reading activities in libraries and supporting the efforts of private organizations through the Children's Dream Fund
 - Encouraging the habit of reading and promoting reading activities through learning activities in schools
2. Improving reading materials and otherwise maintaining and enhancing reading-friendly conditions
 - Establishing reading-friendly environments in communities, e.g., at libraries and the library rooms of community halls
 - Improving reading materials at libraries, promoting greater computerization, and training librarians
 - Drafting/implementing a five-year plan on improvements at school libraries, promoting greater computerization, and encouraging school librarians to issue official announcements
3. Promoting approaches involving cooperation between schools, libraries, other organizations and private groups
 - Collaborating and cooperating with other libraries, schools, health centers, other organizations and private groups
 - Maintaining comprehensive systems to promote these approaches in communities
4. Informing and educating a broader segment of the public to boost public momentum
 - Pursuing nationwide educational and publicity efforts centered on Children's Reading Day (April 23)
 - Providing relevant information on a broader basis by the launch of a website

Since the Law on the Promotion of Children's Reading Activities went into effect, MEXT has been using Children's Reading Day (April 23) to deepen interest in and understanding on children's reading activities among the general public, and has been holding an annual forum on the promotion of children's activities in celebration of Children's Reading Day to boost children's desire to read. In the forum, MEXT offers Minister's Awards to schools, libraries and organizations whose efforts to encourage children to read have been particularly exemplary. In addition, examples of practical approaches taken to promote reading among children is publicized, and commemorative speeches is given by famous authors.

Also in line with the Basic Plan for the Promotion of Children's Reading Activities, the following steps are being taken as part of a National Children's Reading Promotion Campaign to deepen interest in and understanding of the importance of children's reading activities among the Japanese public:

- (1) distributing "Children's Reading Day" posters and other posters
- (2) distributing pamphlets that explain to parents/guardians the importance of children's reading activities
- (3) hosting reading festivals featuring speeches and symposiums
- (4) conducting survey research on pioneering, effective and practical means developed by cities, towns and villages to encourage reading by children
- (5) carrying out fact-finding surveys on private organizations active in communities

MEXT has been working in close cooperation with other ministries under the Basic Plan for the Promotion of Children's Reading Activities to further upgrade its policies on promoting children's reading activities.

(3) Dealing with Problem Youth Behavior

The number of criminal cases involving juvenile offenders that are referred to prosecutors has remained high, and the frequent commission by young offenders of crimes that shock the public make the situation a very serious one (Figure 1-1-8, Figure 1-1-9).



▲ Children's Reading Day poster

Figure ♦ 1-1-8

Number of juvenile offenders referred to prosecutors on criminal charges, and population ratio (1949 – 2003)

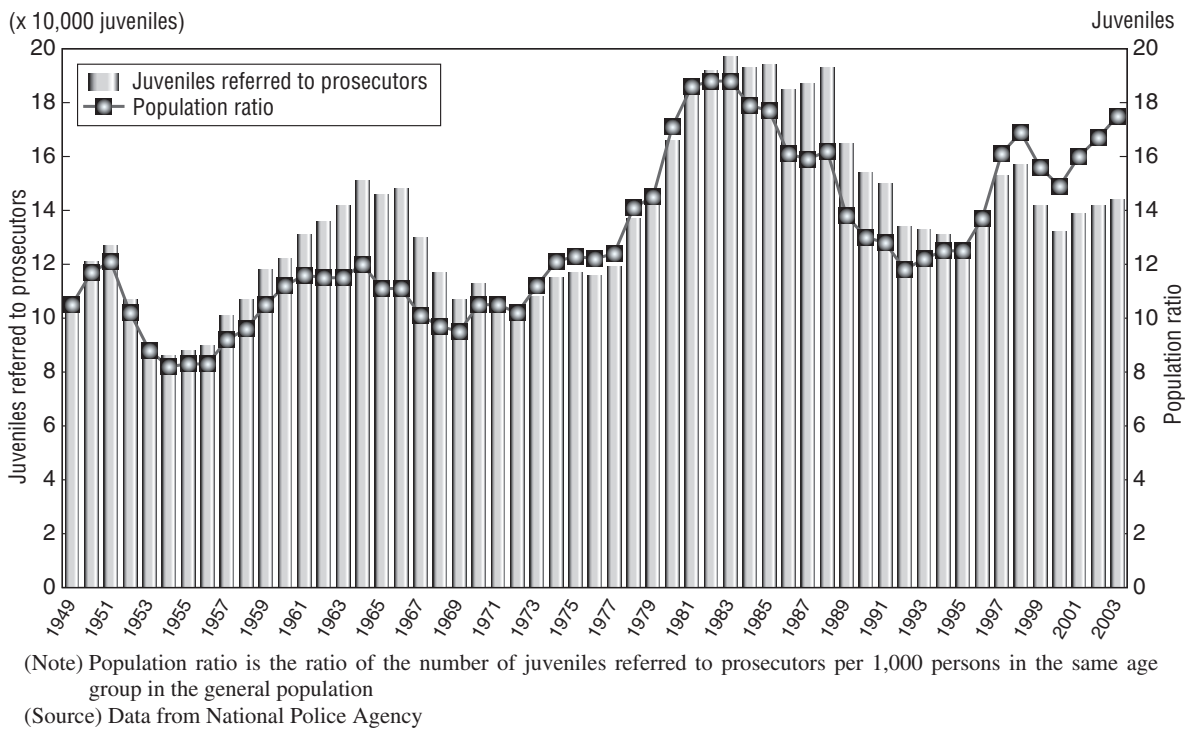
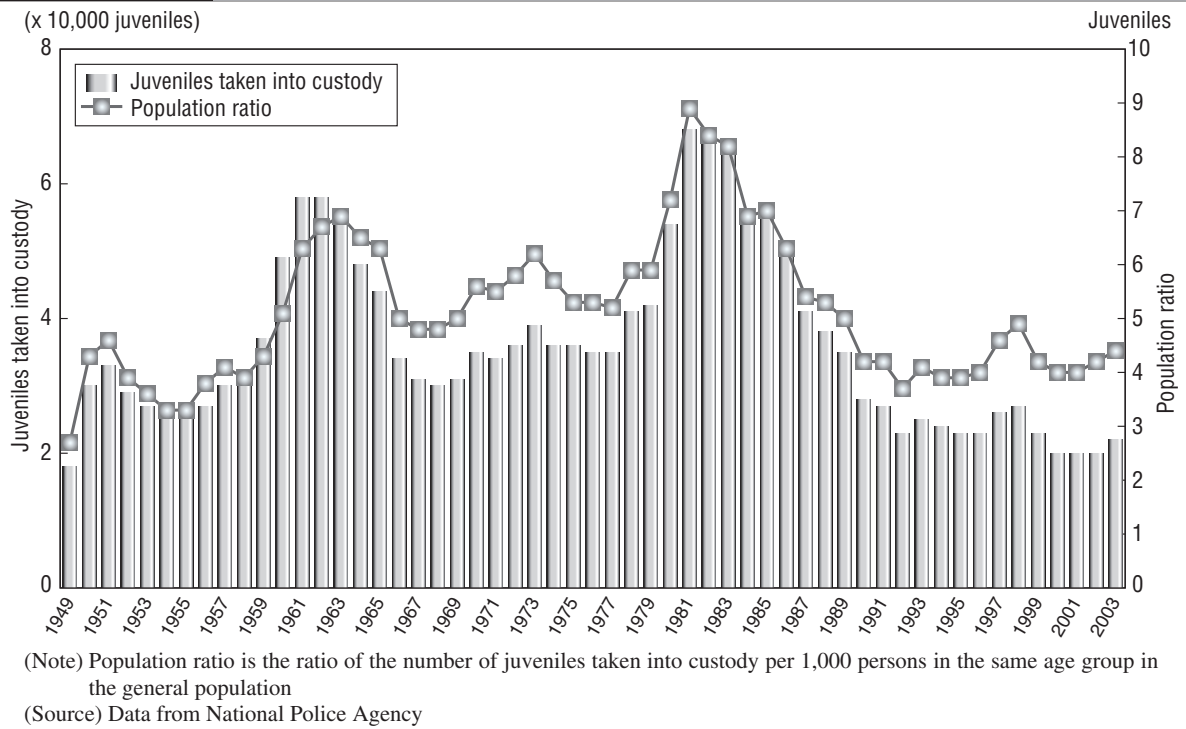


Figure ♦ 1-1-9

Juveniles taken into custody for violations of criminal law and population ratio (1949 – 2003)



In addition to a decline in social morals, other social conditions thought to be reasons or background factors for these trends are: (1) disciplinary issues in homes from infancy, (2) approaches to instruction in schools, (3) inadequate daily-life experiences, and (4) lessened consideration for others and a diluted sense of connectedness between people in the midst of material prosperity; these elements are intertwined in a complex manner in the environment surrounding youth.

Consequently it is imperative that children acquire a firm respect for social norms and ethical values that allow them to distinguish between right and wrong, an awareness of the importance of life, and considera-

tion for others. To ensure that actions deemed impermissible by society as a whole are also deemed impermissible by children, resolute guidance should be offered in addressing problem behavior to foster understanding of the need to obey laws and rules.

MEXT has been endeavoring to enhance measures in collaboration/cooperation with other ministries and agencies in line with National Youth Development Policy approved by the government in December 2003 and the Action Plan to Realize a Society Equipped to Fight Crime.

MEXT is taking measures, such as developing community-based support systems (see Part 4 [4] in this Chapter). In regard to school education, leading measures are:

- (1) enhancing moral education and promoting experiential activities,
- (2) improving the educational counseling system by allocation of school counselors, etc., and
- (3) establishing support teams comprising of schools, boards of education, and other relevant organizations (probation officers, a consultation office for children, police, etc.) to deal with individual schoolchildren with behavioral problems.

In regard to youth support, MEXT has informed boards of education of the understanding which was agreed in September 2004 as “Development of a Youth Support System through Cooperation between Relevant Organization” at the Division Director Meeting on Youth Delinquency Countermeasures (a division director-level meeting hosted by the Cabinet Office) attended by various ministry and agency representatives to promote their measures.

As regard to education by local communities and families, MEXT supports the development of safe and secure children’s spaces (activity spots) (see Part 3 [2] in this Chapter). It also entrusts local governments with projects which gives opportunities to troubled youth by collaborating and cooperating with community volunteer groups, youth groups, and sports clubs to combat juvenile delinquency. In addition, it implements “programs to build spaces for ongoing activities involving juvenile delinquents that support the rehabilitation of these youths”, and prepares and distributes “Pocketbooks for Home Education” as collections of valuable hints on parenting (see Part 5 of this Chapter).

(4) Measures to Counter Harmful Environments Surrounding Youths

The social environments surrounding young people are said to have a strong impact on the formation of the character of young people in the course of their development. Above all, information thought harmful to young people – depictions of sex and violence in television programs, Internet websites, video games and other media – is regarded as one reason behind the growing seriousness of youth delinquency and constitutes a major problem for the sound development of youth. There are also concerns about the adverse impact on character development of information not plainly acknowledged as “harmful” for children, such as scenes of violence repeatedly shown in game software and video games, because it has become a regular part of their day-to-day lives. Organizations connected with television programs, Internet, video games and other media are being asked to adopt voluntary approaches to ascertaining the degree of impact and to creating a better environment for the sound development of youth.

The April 2004 Division Director Meeting on Measures to Nurture Youth (a division director-level meeting hosted by the Cabinet Office) attended by various ministry and agency representatives reached an understanding on “Guidelines on Improving the Environment Surrounding Youth” to pursue measures designed to counter the harmful environment surrounding youths set down in the Outline of Measures to Nurture Youth approved on December 2003. The Guidelines summarize matters to be addressed by the national government as well as requests to be made of local governments and relevant industry organizations by the national government; these requests have subsequently been submitted in writing.

Since 1998, MEXT has requested that the movie, television, video and other relevant industries adopt stronger voluntary constraints and has requested economic organizations to consider when becoming sponsors. To help parents, guardians and local residents in their efforts to counter harmful information, MEXT has been supporting the nationwide monitoring surveys* of television programs that have been

*** Monitoring survey**

A questionnaire survey of 10,000 persons (5th and 8th graders around the country and their parents/guardians) on the TV viewing habits of children and evaluations of television program content

carried out from FY1998 by the National Congress of Parents and Teachers Associations of Japan. These groups present television stations and sponsors with requests based on the results of these surveys, and their efforts – in conjunction with voluntary approaches by the broadcasting industry – have produced some improvements in program content and achieved certain other results.

“Law on Restrictions Governing the Solicitation of Children via Internet Dating Services” was passed and promulgated in June 2003 and went into force in September of that year. Article 5 of that Law stipulated that “the national and local governments shall endeavor to inform and educate the public to deepen understanding on the need to prevent the use of Internet dating services by children,” and MEXT accordingly provided prefectural boards of education with an overview of the Law listing specific points of note.

Countering the harmful environment surrounding youths will require the effort of Japanese society as a whole, and the enthusiastic activities of NPOs are essential in this regard. Since FY2001 MEXT has, with the cooperation of academic experts, been conducting surveys on the sophisticated approaches being taken by NPOs overseas. Surveys of NPOs in the US were conducted in FY2001 (“Children and Television”), FY2002 (“Children and the Internet”), and FY2003 (“Children and Television Games”), and the results of these surveys have been compiled as reports to serve broadly as multifaceted references.

Together with entrusting to local governments improvements to the system for promoting countermeasures against harmful environments in communities, MEXT has from FY2004 been engaged in projects to improve the ability of children and their parents/guardians to utilize information by educating them on the usefulness of media, the problems facing children, and media literacy*. MEXT has also hosted forums that address specific conditions in communities and has been engaged in educational activity programs for preparing and distributing leaflets to children and their parents/guardians.

After the case of the murder of a young schoolgirl in Sasebo City in Nagasaki Prefecture in June 2004, a project team was organized within MEXT to study possible responses to problematic student behavior; this team compiled a priority program in October (see Part 4 [4] of this Chapter). This program focused on giving better guidance on morals and manners to students living in an information-oriented society, and MEXT accordingly is further endeavoring to institute measures to counter the harmful environment surrounding youths.

(5) Promoting International Youth Exchange

MEXT subsidizes international youth exchange projects implemented by such organizations as the Scout Association of Japan and the National Council of Youth Organizations in Japan. Furthermore, MEXT entrusted youth organizations to send Japanese youths overseas and invite young people from other countries to Japan. In the projects, to joint experiential activities for young people in Japan, partner countries, activities exposing these young people to the traditions and cultures of other countries.

National youth education facilities such as the National Olympics Memorial Youth Center are also offering such international exchange programs as the Asia Regional Youth Educators and Instructors Seminar and the Youth International Network Forum.



▲ Sound Youth Development Forum

(6) Hosting Sound Youth Development Forums

To promote education on youth development, to foster understanding and cooperation on approaches toward sound development and delinquency prevention, and to provide a chance to encourage organic collaboration between the parties involved, MEXT has been hosting Sound Youth Development Forums with the participation of community youth instructors and representatives of youth organizations to facilitate information exchange and discussions on approaches to sound youth development and practical activities

* Media literacy

(1) The ability to independently read and understand media, (2) the ability to access and utilize media, and (3) the ability to create communication through media.

ongoing in Japan and other countries.

As it is important that young people be self-aware of their own roles and responsibilities in society in ensuring their sound development, national youth forums are held to allow exchanges of opinion and debates among high school students on activities by high school students to contribute to society and on effective measures to promote these activities.

Part 4

Creating a Sound Environment to Nurture/Protect Children – School Approaches

1 Sound Development of Youth

(1) Enhancing Physical Education Classes

School-based “physical education” builds the foundations for enjoying exercise for the rest of one’s life, and physical education at schools has grown all the more important given the decline in schoolchildren’s physical fitness in recent years.

In the Courses of Study, the mind and body are considered an integral whole in “physical and health education,” which seeks to cultivate the qualifications and skills needed for actively enjoying exercise and to improve physical fitness through greater understanding of exercise and rational application of this knowledge. This Outline went into full implementation at elementary and junior high schools in FY2002, and will be first utilized at high schools with the class entering in FY2003, implemented as that class progresses.

MEXT has been preparing instructional materials for developing appropriate educational guidance in line with the new Courses of Study, holding curriculum briefings and holding central workshops for school physical education instructors and other training sessions to improve the instructional skills of teachers.

Key points in Courses of Study (physical education)

- Using home education learning opportunities to help parents understand the importance of reading
- Adapting the curriculum to enable a greater choice of activities suited to differing levels of development among schoolchildren, with content focused on improving physical fitness
- Incorporating warm-up exercise with the aim of having students take new notice of their own bodies while improving their physical well-being
- Enabling guidance to be provided more flexibly to suit the particular circumstances of schoolchildren and schools so that schoolchildren are able to engage in learning in accordance with their own abilities, and newly developing a variety of ball sports for exercise matched to conditions at schools and in communities

(2) Supporting Extracurricular Sports Club Activities

The rate of participation for schoolchildren in school sports club activities has held constant over recent years. However, the drop in the number of schoolchildren participating in school sports club activities attributable to lower numbers of schoolchildren, the aging of instructors, and a decline in practical athletic instruction skills mean that some schools are unable on their own to organize teams or cannot provide sufficient instruction; in certain sports/events, schools may even find it infeasible to continue particular sports clubs (**Figure 1-1-10, Figure 1-1-11, Figure 1-1-12, Figure 1-1-13**).

For that reason, MEXT has launched programs to promote the use of outside instructors for school sports club activities, has designated certain test communities, and has carried out research on promoting general school sports club activities so that multiple sports are available each season and on cooperation between

Figure ♦ 1-1-10 Number of junior high school students belonging to school sports clubs

Year	Number of students belonging to school sports clubs			Number of students			Membership rate (%)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
FY2001	1,576,788	1,109,128	2,685,916	2,041,810	1,950,101	3,991,911	77.2	56.8	67.3
FY2003	1,480,815	1,174,484	2,655,299	1,915,040	1,833,279	3,748,319	77.3	64.1	70.8

(Source) Surveyed by Nippon Junior High School Physical Culture Association

Figure ♦ 1-1-11 Number of high school students belonging to school sports clubs

Year	Number of students belonging to school sports clubs			Number of students			Membership rate (%)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
FY2001	934,935	486,977	1,421,912	2,042,452	2,019,304	4,061,756	45.7	24.1	35
FY2003	956,462	468,561	1,425,023	1,927,522	1,882,305	3,809,827	49.6	24.8	37.4

(Source) Surveyed by All Japan High School Athletic Federation and Japan High School Baseball Federation

Figure ♦ 1-1-12 Number of sport-specific school sports clubs in junior high schools

	Sport	1993	1998	2003	(2003 – 1993)		(2003 – 1998)	
					Change (#)	Change (%)	Change (#)	Change (%)
Male	Rubber baseball	8,830	8,954	9,007	177	2.0	53	0.6
	Basketball	7,383	7,597	7,444	61	0.8	-153	-2.0
	Table tennis	7,909	7,365	7,212	-697	-8.8	-153	-2.1
	Soccer	6,471	7,065	6,969	498	7.7	-96	-1.4
	Track and field	7,649	7,177	6,436	-1,213	-15.9	-741	-10.3
Female	Volleyball	9,463	9,315	8,946	-517	-5.5	-369	-4.0
	Soft tennis	7,981	7,790	7,575	-406	-5.1	-215	-2.8
	Basketball	7,588	7,555	7,464	-124	-1.6	-91	-1.2
	Track and field	7,536	6,950	6,318	-1,218	-16.2	-632	-9.1
	Table tennis	7,075	6,356	6,203	-872	-12.3	-153	-2.4

(Source) Surveyed by Nippon Junior High School Physical Culture Association

Figure ♦ 1-1-13 Number of sport-specific school sports clubs in high schools

	Sport	1993	1998	2003	(2003 – 1993)		(2003 – 1998)	
					Change (#)	Change (%)	Change (#)	Change (%)
Male	Basketball	4,191	4,356	4,362	171	4.1	6	0.1
	Soccer	4,095	4,203	4,288	193	4.7	85	2.0
	Track and field	4,402	4,342	4,274	-128	-2.9	-68	-1.6
	Hardball	4,091	4,157	4,223	132	3.2	66	1.6
	Table tennis	4,063	3,884	3,921	-142	-3.5	37	1.0
Female	Volleyball	4,391	4,336	4,302	-89	-2.0	-34	-0.8
	Basketball	4,103	3,994	3,946	-157	-3.8	-48	-1.2
	Track and field	4,192	4,025	3,888	-304	-7.3	-137	-3.4
	Badminton	3,131	3,289	3,400	269	8.6	111	3.4
	Kendo	3,480	3,198	3,241	-239	-6.9	43	1.3

(Source) Surveyed by All Japan High School Athletic Federation and Japan High School Baseball Federation

joint school sports club activities where teams can be organized with members from several schools and cooperation between school sports clubs and community sports clubs. MEXT is also actively promoting the establishment of club houses at which schoolchildren in school sports clubs can interact with local residents and the conversion of more exercise grounds to grass sports fields.

(3) Improving Athletic Meets

School athletic meets such as the National Lower Secondary School Athletic Meet and the National Upper Secondary School General Athletic Meet are held as part of school educational activities. Because these competitions exhibit the achievements of day-to-day school sports club activities and because exchange with students from other schools has a major educational benefit, MEXT supports the expansion of school athletic meets.

MEXT is also reviewing the regulations governing faculty sponsors in charge of students participating in school athletic meets so that outside instructors and not just teachers and other staff assigned to a particular school can be permitted to serve in such a capacity in exceptional instances. These faculty sponsor regulations have applied since FY2003 to the National Lower Secondary School Athletic Meet and since FY2004 to the National Upper Secondary School General Athletic Meet.



▲ Opening Ceremony of the National Upper Secondary School General Athletic Meet

(4) Creating Sports Sites – Creating Sports Sites Nationwide

Setting participation in national athletic meets as both a goal and an incentive for elementary, junior high and high school students contributes also to forming a positive and dynamic society and is hence extremely meaningful. The establishment of symbolic venues for sports competitions such as Koshien Stadium (baseball) and National Stadium (soccer) encourage children to participate in athletic meets and thereby promote sports; local public organizations also find this effective from the perspective of vitalizing communities through sports.

In holding such competitions, however, support is necessary to address issues connected with running athletic meets such as selecting venues, securing funding, and reconciling the differing needs of local governments and sports organizations. Under the direction of Prime Minister Koizumi, MEXT and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications are engaged in programs to create sports venues where national athletic meets can be reliably held on a continuing basis with the cooperation of sports organizations and cities, towns and villages.

This program will assess and coordinate the sports organizations and cities/towns/villages and provide necessary financial support so that national athletic meets for elementary, junior high and high school students can be held regularly and continually in the same cities/towns/villages with cooperation from sports organizations and those cities/towns/villages.

2 Enhancing Moral Education/Experiential Activities in Schools

(1) Measures to Enhance Moral Education

Recent years have seen lessened importance given to the importance of life and consideration for others, a diminished respect for rules and models used to distinguish right from wrong and a weakened sense of public spirit. To cultivate the character and sociality of children in the face of these challenges, better moral education suited to differing stages of emotional development among children has become increasingly significant. MEXT is pursuing several measures designed to enhance moral education in schools.

1) Preparing and distributing “*kokoro no note*” (notebooks for moral education)

“*kokoro no note*” are being distributed to elementary and junior high school students around the country as learning tools for moral education designed to express the nature of morals in a readily comprehensible manner and to inspire children themselves to think about moral values. These “*kokoro no note*” can be used in a variety of school educational activities as well as in day-to-day life, with schoolchildren opening them to particular pages and writing notes and with families discussing issues mentioned in the notebooks.

2) Programs to promote moral education that reverberates in the hearts of schoolchildren

MEXT is conducting practical research to promote moral education that reverberates in the hearts of schoolchildren using creative schemes devised by schools and boards of education that may utilize local human resources or experiential activities, involve the development and use of learning tools, or allow outside participation in moral education classes. MEXT is also offering “Training for instructors promoting education”.

3) Programs for collaborative research with teacher training faculties to enhance moral education

MEXT in FY2004 began research focused on issues involved in improving moral education, including development of effective instructional methods and learning materials for moral education suited to the particular circumstances of schoolchildren and schools through cooperation between boards of education and the teacher training faculties of universities.

4) Assigning “*kokoro no sensei*” (subsidies for expenses incurred in hiring special part-time instructors [moral education])

MEXT provides funding to cover the expenses entailed in assigning to schools as “*kokoro no sensei*” local residents and renowned specialists to promote classes on morals that reverberate in the hearts of schoolchildren.

(2) Measures to Promote Hands-on Activities

Volunteer activities and hands-on activities in nature matched to children’s developmental stages have become greatly significant in the nurturing of a rich humanity and sociability in schoolchildren in a society undergoing urbanization, a declining birthrate, and a weakening of ties in local communities. Since FY2002, MEXT has implemented the “Rich Experience Activity Model Program” and designated communities and schools in each prefecture to promote hands-on activities that will serve as models for other schools. MEXT has since FY2003 also been implementing hands-on activities by designating certain schools to promote inter-community exchange by having schoolchildren from urban areas visit rural regions and other communities richly endowed with natural surroundings to participate in experiences of farming/forestry/fishing and other activities in nature. In FY2004, a number of schools were designated for the promotion of extended-stay experiences which involve living in communal living accommodation and experiences of everyday-life in local communities. MEXT has endeavored to publicize the achievements realized through these approaches by holding exchange meetings nationwide and by preparing/distributing collections of case studies.

3 Creating Safe and Secure Schools

Accidents and disasters occur in all facets of day-to-day life, and children are exposed to a variety of risks. MEXT has long asked prefectural boards of education to enhance school safety management by illustrating with examples specific aspects of safety management requiring inspection and measures for dealing with intruders and other incidents/accidents. In June 2001 a horrendous incident occurred that several children and teachers were killed or injured by a stranger who intruded into at the Ikeda Elementary School attached to Osaka Kyoiku University. After words there seems to be no end to incidents, which threaten the safety of children in school premises or on their way to or from school.

In light of these situations, MEXT has implemented a Safety and Security Project for children” to comprehensively improve responses to school safety and mental health issues (“mental health care”) involving schoolchildren, and has sought to enhance school safety by releasing “An Urgent Appeal on School Safety – Protecting the Safety of Children” (January 2004) to push schools to institute more concrete security

measures.

(1) Promoting Safety Management at Schools

Schools must uncover as early as possible any dangers present in the school environment that could lead to accidents and any risks posed to schoolchildren engaged in school activities, and then, they must establish systems to ensure the security of schoolchildren and to promptly eliminate these dangers and risks.

Understanding the gravity of the incident at the Ikeda Elementary School, MEXT in July 2001 provided prefectural boards of education with a notice on “The Security of Kindergarten Students and Schoolchildren and Example Emergency Measures for Safety Management in Schools,” and took steps such as special local allocation tax measures to cover the expenses necessitated by the installation of surveillance cameras and panic buttons as emergency safety measures. Bearing in mind the views offered by prefectural boards of education, MEXT in August 2001 produced “Amendment of Matters Requiring Inspection [Examples] for the Security of Kindergarten Students and Schoolchildren and School Safety Management” for distribution to prefectural boards of education.

Furthermore, since FY2002 MEXT has been pursuing a “Safety and Security Project for Children” to provide comprehensive approaches to enhancing school safety and emotional care with the aim of safer and more secure schools.

The “hardware” aspect of safety measures was addressed in “Crime Prevention Measures for School Facilities” (November 2002), a compilation of principles for crime prevention measures for school facilities and points of attention when planning and designing such measures. MEXT further sought to enhance the provisions on crime prevention contained within the “Guidelines for Upgrading of School Facilities” (August 2003) and in September 2004 produced a manual providing additional commentary on these provisions. MEXT has also been preparing collections of case studies that introduce unique crime prevention measures adopted by schools.

The “software” side of safety issues was tackled in “Risk Management Manual for School Invasions” (December 2002), a summary of key points for all schools to bear in mind that serves as a reference for concrete responses to intruders for board of education meetings or schools, and in “Examples of Safety Management Approaches at Schools” (June 2003), an introduction to unique approaches to crime prevention adopted at schools. To encourage schools, families and local communities to work together in further promoting safety management, MEXT in FY2002 commenced a “Community-based School Safety Promotion Program” that seeks to implement practical approaches entailing cooperation by families, police and fire departments, PTAs, local governments and other organizations/groups through which local communities can protect schoolchildren, in order to apply successful approaches nationwide. MEXT also is involved in programs to support “crime prevention classes” aimed at improving the safety response skills of schoolchildren, teachers, and school staff through crime prevention drills and emergency aid training.

National subsidies have been provided for the relocation of administrative offices and classrooms for lower grades and for the installation of gates and fences, and ordinary local grant tax measures have been taken to cover the costs of safety measures at public schools.

The teacher’s manual “Emotional Care for Children during Emergencies and Disasters” prepared in March 1998 was amended in August 2003 to incorporate responses not only to natural disasters but also man-made disasters and other emergencies.

These and other steps have been taken to ensure the safety of children at schools nationwide. Nevertheless, another confrontation occurred after the Ikeda Elementary School attack in which an intruder entered the Uji City Elementary School in Uji, Kyoto Prefecture in December 2003 and threatened children, and incidents of children being harmed on their way to or from school continue to be reported. To promote more concrete measures for improving safety at schools, MEXT then released “An Urgent Appeal on School Safety – Protecting the Safety of Children” (January 20, 2004), which listed specific concerns to be addressed in ensuring the safety of children and cooperative measures that could be pursued by schools, families, communities and relevant organizations. This “Urgent Appeal on School Safety” stressed:

- (1) that schools should draft their own crisis management manuals, continually verify their effectiveness through crime prevention drills, and make improvements as needed; and
- (2) that community-based approaches involving collaboration and cooperation between schools, families and local communities are essential for creating safe and secure schools.

MEXT will be continually and systematically devising new school safety measures in future so that schoolchildren can receive education in a secure environment. Schools will likely further open their educational functions and facilities to the public as activity spots for children and as venues for various activities by local residents, since an absolute precondition for this, thoroughgoing safety management is needed at schools.

(2) Enhancing Safety Education at Schools is the Safety of Children

Schools must foster in children respect for their own lives and those of others, understanding on practical safety in all aspects of daily life, and the ability to ensure their own safety throughout their lives. To that end, MEXT offers safety education in the course of school educational activities at all schools, in particular in health and physical education classes, moral education, and special activities.

MEXT has prepared a reference manual on safety education at school for teachers entitled “Safety Education at Schools to Cultivate a Zest for Living” (November 2001). Other reference materials for teachers and learning tools for students with regard to safety education have been produced to advance effective disaster prevention education at schools, including “Expanding Disaster Prevention Education to Cultivate a Zest for Living” (March 1998) a reference for teachers that clarifies the significance and aims of disaster prevention education, the content to be taught and methods of instruction, as well as risk forecast learning tools on traffic safety (March 2002). Workshops on school safety have also been held for teachers, school staff and school education supervisor of prefectural boards of education who play a leading role in safety education in their respective prefectures.

4 Responses to Problematic Student Behavior

Problematic student behavior has been growing, including recent examples of serious crime committed by schoolchildren, in addition to urgent and priority measures, to tackle this problem, a response that deals with the basics of education has to be developed.

In June 2004 an incident occurred at an elementary school in Sasebo City, Nagasaki Prefecture, in which a 6th grader killed a classmate. MEXT subsequently requested that the prefectural boards of education of prefectures and designated cities to pay greater attention and give more detailed guidance to prevent the recurrence of such an incident. A project team was also organized within MEXT that focused on:

- (1) Teaching children the importance of life,
- (2) Building an even better learning environment in which children can learn safely, and
- (3) Giving better guidance on moral and manners to students living in an information-oriented society.

The project team studied measures to put these principles into action in educational settings, and compiled its “Priority Program for Combating Problematic Student Behavior (final report)” in October 2004.

Violence, bullying, school non-attendance and other problematic student behavior stem from causes and background factors that vary in each instance, but in general the contributing elements include:

- (1) parenting and home disciplinary issues from a very young age,
- (2) schools unable to cope adequately with the range of skills and aptitudes of individual schoolchildren, and
- (3) lack of everyday-life experiences, lack of consideration for others, and a diminished sense of connection to other people in a materially wealthy society.

These factors – set in the respective contexts of families, schools, and local communities – are interwoven in a complex fashion, and it can be inferred, that they contribute to the accumulation of stress in children due to an inability to adapt to school life and the excessive expectations of people around them.

Consequently, families, schools, and local communities must fulfill their respective roles and the work together as one to resolve these problems. Under the leadership of their principals, schools must endeavor to establish systems for student guidance in which the whole school works in unison to understand school-children better and to enable them to enjoy their time at school.

For that purpose, MEXT is pursuing measures from the following perspectives:

(1) Achieving Easy-to-Understand Classes, Enjoyable Schools and Augmenting Emotional Education

Schools must be places where children can enjoy learning and energetically engage in activities, and also gain a true sense of their own identity and discover the pleasure of self-actualization. In connection to this idea of enhancing education by cultivating individuality, new steady efforts should be made to ensure that education achieves the aims of the new Course of Study and the five-day school week.

MEXT is working to enhance education in various ways, promoting moral education to nurture student's rich humanity by encouraging hands-on activities both in and out of school, and supporting small-group teaching and instruction suited to students' individual levels of proficiency.

(2) Improving Teachers' Student Guidance Skills

To prevent or at least to discover quickly problem behavior, and resolve it, all teachers must have a correct understanding and accurate awareness of problematic student behavior and have the ability to provide schoolchildren with guidance. Teacher training centers not only provide supervisors with knowledge on problems encountered in student guidance, but also offer training to ensure teachers can cope with issues arising in student guidance, and to help teachers to serve as training instructors themselves and provide instruction and advice to schools based on the training they received. Training on student guidance is also offered at training sessions for new and experienced teachers by prefectural boards of education.

(3) Enhancing Educational Counseling Systems

Educational counseling systems must be established by schools, cities, towns, villages and prefectures to ease the anxieties and worries about school education felt by schoolchildren, parents/guardians, and teachers.

Since FY1995 MEXT has sought to assign clinical psychotherapists – “emotion specialists” – as school counselors. This number of school counselors has been increased steadily to enhance the functions of educational counseling systems at schools. “The Program to Subsidize School Counselor Utilization” began in FY2001, and providing funding to prefectures and designated cities for survey research projects on problems encountered in the use of school counselors (funding offered to 8,500 schools in FY2004). The allocation of school counselors has achieved numerous successes, proving beneficial in both preventing, discovering and eliminating problematic student behavior and providing advice to parents/guardians and teachers on interacting with children.

Counselors for children and parents have also being assigned to elementary schools from FY2004, and research is being conducted on the prevention of, or early discovery of and response to, school non-attendance.

(4) Cooperation among Schools, Families, Communities, and Relevant Organizations

It is crucial that schools, families, communities and other organizations join together in resolving problematic student behavior. To develop responses tailored to individual case of problematic student behavior, MEXT has been establishing support systems in communities by, for instance, forming support teams comprising of schools, boards of education, and relevant organizations. MEXT is also carrying out programs tackle problematic behavior by promoting cooperative action by communities, which involves research on the availability and functions of support inside and outside school to deal with non-attendance among schoolchildren due to truancy or more serious example of delinquency. A project to establish schooling support networks (SSN) in communities is also underway to deal with non-attendance among schoolchildren in a more detailed manner.

Part 5

Creating a Sound Environment to Nurture/Protect Children – Family Support Approaches

As the starting point for all education, home education plays an important role in helping children acquire basic lifestyle habits, life skills, good taste, fundamental ethical values such as consideration for others and distinction between right and wrong, self-independence and self-control, and social manners. However, changes to families and their social circumstances resulting from urbanization, family nuclearization, falling birthrate, and the dilution of local ties in recent years have produced a decline in the educational functions of families.

In March 2004 the “the Report for Home Education Support: Facilitation of Cooperation between the Government and Parenting Support Organizations” (a report by the Study Research Committee for Home Education Support on Cooperation between the Government and Parenting Support Organizations) was released. This report identified contemporary issues in supporting home education, pointed out the need for cooperation between the government and parenting support organizations such as parenting circles and parenting networks*, and recommended strategies for cooperation. Taking this report under consideration, MEXT has sought to enhance cooperation between the government and parenting support organizations while working to improve support for home education by providing learning opportunities and information on home education.



▲ “Facilitation of Cooperation between the Government and Parenting Support Organizations for Home Education Support”

1 Supporting Learning by Each and Every Parent

To improve their educational abilities of families, parents need to have access to places where they can learn about and gain experience in being a parent. Therefore MEXT has, under its General Program to Promote Home Education Support (hereinafter, “General Program”) launched in FY2004, entrusted several tasks to Community Home Education Promotion Councils staffed by representatives of government and parenting support organizations so as to provide learning opportunities on occasions in which many parents participate for parents.



▲ Lecture to help junior high and high school students understand parenting (Sakura East Prefectural High School, Chiba Prefecture)

More specifically, MEXT has been offering Parenting Lectures tailored to different stages of child development by utilizing such opportunities as maternity classes and newborn/infant health examinations conducted at health centers as well as health examinations for children starting school, school enrollment briefings, and school meetings with parents/guardians. Furthermore, from FY2004, Parenting Lectures for Comprehension are also being offered to help junior high and high school students who are parents of the future, better understand parenting and gain a greater appreciation for home education at their young ages.

* Parenting networks

Parent networks are groups that bring together parents currently raising children, experienced parents who have finished raising children, leaders of parenting circles, and experts on parenting for the purpose of providing broad-ranged support to parents raising children; these networks not only link parents raising children with parenting circles but they also offer a wide variety of learning/educational opportunities such as daycare support, parenting counseling, information and exchanges (as described in the “Report for Home Education Support : Facilitation of Cooperation between the Government and Parenting Support Organizations”).

MEXT has also been distributing Pocketbooks for Home Education that are full of hints on parenting very helpful to individual parents. These Pocketbooks were previously published in two volumes – one for parents of newborns/infants and one for parents of elementary/junior high students – but from FY2004 the Pocketbooks were revised in three volumes to more closely match the development of children: *Doki Doki* Parenting (for parents of infants/newborns), *Waku Waku* Parenting (for parents of lower elementary school to junior high school students), and *Iki Iki* Parenting (for parents of upper elementary school to junior high school students). In addition, its content was also expanded to cover child abuse, the use of cell phones and personal computers, and the safety and health of children. The Pocketbooks are given out free of charge to parents when they are issued maternity passbook or through elementary schools to offer them a collection of hints on day-to-day parenting. The Pocketbooks are also used in a variety of lectures and workshops.

A variety of home education videos that discuss parenting from pregnancy through infancy all the way to puberty have been prepared, including “A Rousing Cheer from the Heart: Early Adolescence, A Wonderful Time for Both Parent and Child” that covers the characteristics of children going through puberty and “Give It Your All, Dad! A Documentary on Fathers’ Parenting Struggles” that looks at the participation of fathers in home education. These videos are utilized as learning materials in community halls and health centers around the country, and are lent out for PTA meetings and parenting circle learning sessions.



▲ The three-volume “Pocketbook for Home Education”

2 Supporting Home Education by the Regional Communities and the Whole Society

To improve the educational functions of families, an environment is required in which regional communities and the whole society support home education. MEXT has been implementing the General Program in FY2004 to promote home education support via cooperation between the government and parenting support groups, and has been conducting some projects including organizing national education forums to boost momentum toward home education support.

From FY2000 to FY2003, MEXT had trained parenting supporters who were available for consultations on parenting and discipline to provide in-depth advice. In the course of implementing the General Program, MEXT has from FY2004 been training leaders for parenting supporters that are active over wider areas and has been encouraging mutual cooperation between parenting supporters and providing opportunities for information exchange in order to further enhance counseling systems within communities.

Moreover, to facilitate participation of fathers in home education, MEXT have organized gatherings to help fathers reconsider their participation in home education and symposiums on community activities designed to promote father-child interaction and the participation of fathers in home education.

To create an environment that protects children, some of the Parenting Lectures are taking such approaches as parents and children actually walking around their town, noting dangers and risks, and talking together about safety.



▲ Father-child interaction (Kyoto City)