

Japan Country Summary

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Please note: The majority of the information in this document was taken directly from the Japan Background Report (MEXT, 2003) that was written for the publication of *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* (OECD, 2005). Country representatives provided additional information. This country profile was created for the Aspen-OECD Bellagio Seminar, How Can Teacher Policies Improve Student Learning? October 17-20, 2006, Bellagio, Italy.

Japan

Country Summary—General Facts and Information

Population: ~128,000,000

Education expenditures:

- As a percentage of GDP (includes primary, secondary and tertiary): 4.6% (3.5% public; 1.2% private)
- Per pupil expenditure in US dollars (2001) (includes primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary): \$8,144 (OECD, 2005b)

Teacher demographics (1.1 million):

- Gender distribution (% female):
 - Primary: 63%
 - Lower Secondary: 40%
 - Upper Secondary: 25%
- Percentage of unqualified teachers: <4%
- Salary after 15 years experience (equivalent US \$): \$46,000 (OECD, 2005)
- Trends:
 - Continuing oversupply of teachers
 - Generally teach until retirement

Student demographics (~17 million):

- Eligible for free school meals: n/a
- Minority ethnic population: n/a
- Non-native language speakers: n/a
- Graduation rate (Upper secondary (2003)): 91% (OECD, 2005)
- PISA Math mean score (2003): 534 (above OECD average) (OECD, 2005)
- Trends:
 - Recent decrease in enrollment (declining birthrate) likely to continue.

Structure of the education system:

- Governance:
 - Education is the responsibility of the national, prefectural (47 regions) and municipal governments.
 - The national government role in education is to:
 - Set standards for schools, curricula, teacher certification, and class sizes, and
 - Provide some financial support to local governments.
 - The national government pays 50% of a national minimum for all schools ensuring teacher salaries are not entirely based on municipalities capacity to pay.
 - Prefectural boards of education appoint teachers and provide guidance to municipalities on educational content and management.
- Teacher employment:
 - Teachers are civil servants employed by prefectures on fixed salary scales.
 - Certification requires an education degree and passage of qualification tests.
 - Unionization: Nearly half of teachers in Japan are members of a union, although membership is in decline. Unions negotiate with the government over salaries and working conditions.
- Average class size:
 - Public primary: 29
 - Public lower secondary: 34

Curriculum and Assessment:

- There is a national curriculum (Courses of Study) established by the government.
- Students take exams after grade 9 to determine if they will attend 3 years of upper secondary school.
- After secondary school, similar exams determine competitive entrance to tertiary education.

Current Education Reform Context in Japan

This section summarizes current education reform initiatives in order to provide context for the discussion of teacher policy initiatives that follows.

Education Reform Plan for the 21st Century

- Great changes in society and economy have led to a desire to ensure schools not only teach the fundamentals, but that they also foster the ability of students to think on their own and provide a strong emotional education component.
- A report from the National Commission on Education Reform (2000) recommended the education system make changes to incorporate the following goals:
 - Foster a rich sense of humanity in the Japanese people; and
 - Develop the talents of individuals and foster creativity.
- In 2001, the Ministry (MEXT) developed the *Education Reform Plan for the 21st Century* building on these recommendations including the following teacher policies which will be described in more detail later in this brief:
 - Introducing a commendation system for teachers;
 - Providing special salary increases for excellent teachers;
 - Taking appropriate measure for teachers who lack teaching abilities; and
 - Establishing a Social Experience Training Program for Teachers.
- In addition, the Education Reform Plan includes:
 - A plan for evaluating schools and providing information and guidance for improvement;
 - A plan (Plan for Lively Schools) for utilizing “outstanding working people” (not trained to be teachers) as part-time teachers in schools in order to bring professional knowledge and knowledge of the greater society into schools.
 - The ability to hire individuals from the private sector (without teaching certificates) to be principals in schools.

Japan Teacher Policy Highlights

Attracting and Supporting New Teachers

Induction:

- All new teachers participate in an extensive induction program. Considerable time and resources are directed at this program.
- 90 school days are designated for professional development (some schools require more):
 - Minimum of 60 days of in-school training (2 days per week) working with a guiding teacher and others)
 - Minimum of 30 days of outside-school training (1 day per week) at in-service centers in each prefecture and select cities (often requires overnight stay)
- 6 categories of program content: basic knowledge of schooling/current conditions, classroom management, subject guidance, moral education, activities (sports and clubs), and pupil guidance.
- National outline for induction is a guide and school systems modify it to meet their needs.
- Additional details on induction are provided later in this document.

Improving Schools as Places to Work and Learn

Lesson Study:

- Japan's school system has "lesson study" as an institutionalized process:
 - Teachers meet regularly over long periods of time to work on the design, implementation, testing and improvement of lessons.
 - This work is a part of teachers' regular day.
 - Provides the primary basis for a coherent school improvement system and professional development.
- Additional details on lesson study are provided later in this document.

Required Professional Development/Evaluation:

- As of 2003, professional development is required of teachers with 10 years of experience.
- The National Center for Teachers' Development provides government professional development courses to lead teachers (and principals, described below) who then share what they have learned back in their school systems.
- Professional development is also offered by regional prefectures and municipal boards and other organizations.
- Teachers with 10 years experience also participate in Social Experience Training (teachers experience business, social welfare or other settings) to improve their understanding of the societal needs of schooling.
- Some prefectures also offer courses for teachers with 5 and 15 years experience depending on local need. (These courses are not required by law.)

- New individualized approach to professional development:
 - Courses have evaluation and instruction components.
 - Teachers are first evaluated to determine their needs, and then their course plan is designed to meet their specific needs.

Professional Development for Principals:

- Policymakers recognize recent changes in the education system and teacher evaluation/in-service system will require principals to obtain new skills.
- Professional development training for principals is offered by both the National Center and the prefectures and municipalities.

Pay and Career Structure

Rewarding Efficient/Excellent Teachers:

- In general, minimum salaries are fixed at the national level, and therefore there are not major differences across the country.
- In some areas, regional boards have experimented with financial rewards for excellent teachers.

Requirement for Teachers to Change Schools:

- All Japanese teachers in public schools are required to move to new schools every five or ten years in order to:
 - raise the level of teaching in the region overall, and
 - ensure all schools have strong teachers.

Focus on Two Teacher Policy Initiatives New Teacher Induction & Lesson Study

New Teacher Induction

Note: This summary of Japan’s new teacher induction program is directly based on the profile in *Comprehensive Teacher Induction: Systems for Early Career Learning* (Britton, Paine, Pimm & Raizen, 2003). Some additional information is from *Teachers Matter* (OECD, 2005) and the Japan Country Background Report (MEXT, 2004).

Overview

Japan’s formal induction program began in the 80s with the recognition that the pre-service preparation program was heavily focused on subject matter content without providing enough practical classroom experience. Therefore, it was determined that intensive support was necessary in classroom practice during teachers’ first years. The goal of induction is improving the quality of teaching, not teacher retention. All new teachers participate in the induction and substantial resources are committed to this effort. The education ministry provides a national outline of the minimum required induction program, and regional governments and school districts tailor and expand this program for their local purposes.

In-school Component

New teacher success is the goal of all professionals in the building. The majority of the in-school training, however, consists of working with a “guiding teacher” two days per week (60 days per year) on issues of subject matter and general teaching issues. Work includes team-teaching, observations, reflective journals, and having new teachers observe other teachers in the building. The guiding teacher and new teacher jointly design a program that best meets the new teacher’s needs. Key areas undertaken in this mentoring process include: understanding pupils, teacher confidence, classroom management, planning/teaching lessons, homeroom duties, etc. Both the guiding teacher and the new teacher have a reduced (75%) teaching load.

The process for selecting guiding teachers varies across schools, although all stress the importance that the guiding teacher teach the same subject and have an excellent reputation. Administrators go to great lengths to ensure a subject-matter match between the teachers including hiring temporary teachers to serve as guides, creating an open position at a school with an appropriate guide, and moving guiding teachers to schools that need them. In some cases a

new teacher has two guiding teachers in order to ensure they have support from a teacher of the same subject. Most agree that the quality of the guiding teacher and their relationship with the new teacher is pivotal to whether or not the new teacher feels successful. Despite the critical nature of the guiding teacher's role, there is little training for these teachers.

Out-of-school Training

The goal of the out-of-school training is to expand the breadth of the perspective of the new teachers by having them meet with teachers from other regions while growing professionally. This training takes place either at a city or regional in-service center for 30 days of the school year. These centers are large, staffed organizations designed to meet the needs of new teachers. Many have dormitories where they house teachers for overnight stays during their induction days. The work in these centers is designed by the staff based on the national model for induction taking local needs into consideration. It is not focused on subject-specific content, but on broadening teachers' experiences. While teachers attend these centers, school administrators often cover their classes.

Approximately 20% of new teachers also attend a shipboard program in which teachers sail around Japan's islands for nine days stopping at ports to learn about the history/culture of the regions. Initially controversial, this program is valued by teachers for providing an opportunity for sustained contact with other teachers for discussions about their new positions. Aboard the ship the teachers form groups to work on projects. Like the induction centers, the purpose is not to train teachers but to broaden their perspectives.

Research Project

In addition to the in-school and out-of-school training, new teachers generally complete a research project during their first year. This project is usually presented at an out-of-school training session so other teachers can learn from their experiences and findings.

Evaluation

Japan conducts ongoing evaluation of the induction program. There is strong support throughout the education system for the program. According to Britton, et al., most new teachers find the in-school component of working with their guiding teacher and others in the building to be the most effective component of the program. Some criticize the evaluation of the program because there is no pupil achievement or performance data as part of the analysis of program outcomes. The ministry is interested in addressing this concern.

Lesson Study

Note: This summary of Japan's lesson study system is directly based on the description in *The Teaching Gap* (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999).

Japan has pursued a school-based instructional reform effort for the past fifty years. This reform initiative, known as *Kounaikenshuu*, is an ongoing, continuous process in which teachers improve their classroom practice. Teachers participate in school-based professional development groups as part of their jobs. These groups focus on the ongoing analysis, design, implementation and improvement of lessons. This process serves to not only provide ongoing improvement of instruction, but it also provides continual mentoring and training of teachers. Teachers are in charge of these groups, and nearly every elementary and middle school in Japan follows this model. Groups may be set up by grade-level, subject-matter or other special groupings. The specific activities of the group are determined by all-school improvement plans set forth at the beginning of the year.

A key component of this process is *Lesson Study* (*jugyou kenkyuu*). During Lesson Study, teachers meet for weeks, months or even a year to work on a lesson or set of lessons. The following 8 steps provide a general overview of how this process works.

1) Defining the problem: The group spends the early part of their work together defining a problem of practice they will study. Sometimes, the problem is posed from policymakers who have identified a national issue they would like certain schools to study. Alternatively, the problem might be determined by school administrators or by the teachers.

2) Planning the Lesson: The group begins work on designing/revising the lesson. This work draws on research produced by other teachers who have studied this particular issue. The focus is not only to create an effective lesson, but to understand why it works. This lesson is presented to school faculty who will provide additional feedback.

3) Teaching the Lesson: Next, one teacher teaches the lesson and the entire group participates in the preparation of the lesson. All teachers in the group come to the lesson and observe it being taught (students are left in charge of the teachers' classrooms).

4) Evaluating the Lesson and Reflecting on its Effect: The group stays late that day to discuss the lesson. The focus is not individual evaluation of the teacher who taught the lesson. This is a group process and a group critique of the lesson.

5) Revising the Lesson: Teachers make changes based on their experiences with the lesson.

6) Teaching the Revised Lesson: The revised lesson is now taught to a different class either by the same teacher or another member of the group. At this lesson, all members of the faculty are invited to attend.

7) Evaluating and Reflecting, Again: The school faculty now engage in a long meeting about the lesson. Sometimes an outside expert is also invited to join. The focus is on critiquing the lesson, but general issues about teaching and learning are also discussed if they have been raised by this particular lesson.

8) Sharing the Results: Sharing of the findings of a Lesson Study with other teachers and schools is a critical component of this work. This happens either through a report or a published book that may be forwarded to prefectural authorities if it is judged to be very interesting. In addition, teachers from other schools are often invited to observe the teaching of the lesson.

Stigler & Hiebert (1999) offer the following key reflections on what this process offers in terms of instructional improvement:

- Lesson study is based on a long-term, continuous improvement model
- Lesson study maintains a constant focus on student learning
- Lesson study focuses on the direct improvement of teaching in context
- Lesson study is collaborative
- Teachers see themselves as contributing to the development of knowledge as well as to their own growth

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