

Reconstruction of the System Guaranteeing Opportunities for General Education Through the Separation of “Enrollment” and “(Physical) Attendance”^{*}

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Regarding the faults of the Japanese compulsory enrollment system, premised on attendance at a specific school, a forward-looking view must be taken on the guarantee of opportunities for general education via non-physical attendance (online attendance) in which physical attendance is not the default. At this time, municipal Boards of Education are called on to “promote the guarantee of diverse opportunities for general education” and “form public school networks,” while prefectures must establish new councils and comprehensive support centers for a continuous guarantee during the school age across a broad area in cooperation with municipalities.

Keywords: Enrollment obligation / guarantee of opportunities for general education / non-physical attendance / online study

1. This paper’s objective and stance on the problems raised herein

With regard to Japan’s guarantee of the right to receive general education, heretofore premised on the obligation of parents and guardians (below, “parents”) to have their children enroll in school as carried out in their physical attendance (below, “attendance”) of specific schools (compulsory education-level elementary and junior high schools as defined in Article 1 of the School Education Act), the objective of this paper is to consider the reconstruction and prospects of the system guaranteeing opportunities for general education through the separation of “enrollment” and “attendance” and the relativization of physical attendance at specific schools.

The global spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) from late 2019 on stimulated a

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major reappraisal of the practices of guaranteeing opportunities for education in Japan, so far premised on “attendance.” The need to ensure social distance in order to prevent infection promoted the rapid development and expansion of education and study online, through the internet, already widely accepted throughout every aspect of life in society. Online classes and study during the COVID-19 crisis relativized “attendance” (albeit temporarily and partially) in education and study for students, teachers, and parents, leading them to a shared experience of questioning the meaning of attendance.

This “relativization of attendance” has, through online individual study at (wide-area) correspondence high schools¹ (which have increased even as the birthrate falls), become familiar as a form of study at schools regulated by Article 1 of the School Education Law (the so-called Article 1 schools).² The relativization of attendance through online study is now spreading to the junior high school level and to non-Article 1 schools.³ “Non-attendance model” schools, focusing on individual study not predicated on attendance, are likely to increase and expand in the future as they draw the interest of numerous students.⁴ Amid the COVID-19 crisis, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (below, MEXT) has brought forward and promoted its “GIGA School Program,” laying the ground for the integration of ICT terminals for every student and a high-speed, high-capacity communication network while planning to bring about an educational ICT environment “fairly optimized for the individual” which will revolutionize conventional large-group (face-to-face) classes.⁵

In addition, the Act for Guaranteeing the Opportunity of Receiving Education equivalent to General Education at the Compulsory Grades (below, the Educational Opportunity Guarantee Act) enacted in 2016, as well as national policy on non-attending students based thereon,⁶ have relativized “enrollment” at Article 1 schools as well.

As is well known, Article 26 of the Japanese Constitution obligates parents to have the children under their guardianship receive general education, in an effort to guarantee the right of children (who are Japanese nationals) to education. Based on Article 5 of the Basic Education Act enacted in response thereto, Article 17 of the School Education Law defines this obligation as the duty to enroll these children in compulsory education schools (below, schools), that is elementary and junior schools which are Article 1 schools. In short, the obligation of parents to have the children under their guardianship receive general education is the obligation to enroll them in “schools.”⁷ As well, the schools for enrollment are to be designated and notified [to parents] by municipal Boards of Education, as stipulated in the Order for the Enforcement of the School Education Law, Article 5-1 and -2. This regulation tacitly assumes—allowing for certain exceptions (when a reasonable issue has been recognized) and for cases such as enrollment in national or private schools where the regulation is not applicable—that children will “attend” the school at which they are “enrolled” in all cases.

After World War II, Japan’s aim was to guarantee fairly a given level of educational conditions, through this tacit premise—that with the premise of “enrollment,” i.e. that children would enter, remain at, and (physically) attend specific schools, the national government would determine class size standards and assign teachers based on numbers of classes.

However, of the so-called non-attending students, those not in (physical) attendance for a given amount of time (30 days per year) or more, only a few were considered on their guidance records⁸ to be “attending” school via educational support centers, etc.⁹ When this “considered attendance” is seen as having “attended” the school of registration, children

learning at free schools, etc., to which “considered attendance” is not applicable, or staying at home, are under the current law “not having their right to general education guaranteed” (although some “have their right to opportunities equivalent to general education ensured”). That is, premised on children’s attendance at (Article 1) schools, the current law, which guarantees their right to education based on parents’ fulfillment of their enrollment obligation, contains a systematic pitfall in the form of the failure to guarantee the right to education to children who are not attending (or not considered to be attending) school. In fact, “non-attendance countermeasures” have been taken in various forms to remedy this issue. However, the concept of a system which can dependably guarantee the right to general education to all children, remedying this problem without leaving any of these non-attending children “in a status without rights¹⁰”, along with the realization thereof, is being raised as a serious and urgent issue.

Previous research on the guarantee of the right to general education in Japan has discussed extensively the diversification of suppliers of school education, the ensurement of publicness in public budget spending in response thereto, and so on.¹¹ However, these discussions address the scope of enrollment with “attendance” taken for granted, rather than focusing on the “pitfall” in the guarantee of the right to general education in Japan noted above or working toward a conception of systems to better the situation.

Based on the above, this paper examines the following. First, it organizes the current laws concerning enrollment and confirms the issues (pitfalls) of the system of enrollment obligation. Next, having clarified the governmental measures and policies on the non-attendant students who are making these pitfalls visible, the paper considers the significance and limitations of special non-attendant schools. Thereafter, based on the status quo of online study and education progressing amid the COVID-19 crisis, it examines measures potentially guaranteeing opportunities for general education through relativizing attendance at specific schools by separating enrollment and attendance and constructing a network among schools, to wit (1) as above, measures for non-attendant students, (2) opportunities for first language/first culture education for students in need of Japanese language instruction¹², and (3) educational opportunities through cooperation with regions with small schools whose continued existence is under debate in terms of the “optimization” of class and school sizes. Finally, the paper considers the prospects for the reconstruction of the future system for guaranteeing opportunities for general education and the roles required therein of prefectures, which handle wide-area administration along with municipal Boards of Education.¹³

2. Current laws on enrollment and the “pitfalls” of the enrollment obligation system

Let us once again confirm the duties of parents, school principals, and Boards of Education relating to the guarantee of the right to general education in Japan under the current laws.

First, as noted above, parents are obligated to enroll their children (in “school”). The schools in question are designated by municipal Boards of Education. With regard to post-entrance attendance status, the principals must make their students’ attendance status constantly clear (Order for the Enforcement of the School Education Law Article 19) for the

guidance records they create (Regulations for the Enforcement of the School Education Law Article 24-1). However, if students with poor attendance records are absent for seven continuous days (excluding holidays), “upon finding that the parent(s) lack(s) any legitimate reason for failing to make their child attend school,” the principal must immediately inform the municipal Board of Education (Order for the Enforcement of the School Education Law Article 20). Upon notification, the municipal Board of Education, having found that the parent in question is negligent of their obligation as regulated in Article 17-1 or -2 of the School Education Law, must remind the parent to have their child attend school (Order for the Enforcement of the School Education Law Article 21). In order to guarantee the right to general education, the current laws of this kind call on parents to carry out their obligations to enroll the children under their guardianship in school, and on principals and Boards of Education to confirm children’s attendance status and remind parents to do their part. However, when children “cannot easily be enrolled” = “do not or cannot physically attend” [excluding factors such as illness or economic constraints]¹⁴, parents are not considered to have failed to carry out their enrollment obligation.

Based on the above, under the current laws of Japan, the right to general education is premised on the enrollment obligation of the parents, under which they have their children (physically) attend school. However, a flaw—a pitfall—in the system exists, such that when children do not (physically) attend the specific school to which they belong because they “cannot easily be enrolled,” and their parents have not been found negligent of their enrollment obligation, the children’s right to general education is not guaranteed. This pitfall cannot be easily remedied within the current legal system, which renders “enrollment” and “(physical) attendance” inseparable.

3. The status quo of support for non-attending children and its limitations

(1) Current policy on support for non-attending children

The existence of children not attending schools raises wide-ranging questions about the nature of Japanese school education. Based on this paper’s stance on the relevant problems, these questions refer to remedies for the “pitfall” present in the enrollment obligation system premised on the attendance of children at school (Article 1 schools), with regard to the guarantee of the right to general education under the current laws of Japan.

Current support for non-attending children is based on the Notice of October 25, 2019, of the MEXT Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau Director-General (Former MEXT Elementary Education No. 698) on “Support for Children Not Attending School.” This Notice is in turn based on the basic policies regulated by Article 7 of the Educational Opportunity Guarantee Act and on a summary of the discussion on the enforcement status of the law, based on its supplementary provisions. While the Notice’s basic stance on support for non-attending children involves “the need to aim for social independence” “rather than a focus only on the result of ‘attendance at school’ as the objective,” it calls for attention to “the academic delays, future career disadvantages, and risks to social independence” of non-attendance. The Notice also, while emphasizing the role of compulsory education schools, calls for support for social independence through acceptance at various related institutions such as educa-

tional support centers, designated schools for non-attending children, study support using ICT, free schools,¹⁵ nighttime junior high schools¹⁶ and so on, based on the child’s own desires.

However, with regard to this support for social independence, the child can be considered to have “attended” their registered school, that is “considered in attendance for guidance record purposes,” when supported so that “a smooth return to school becomes possible,” given the child’s own desire to attend school.¹⁷ As well, the use of study via ICT, etc., as “considered attendance” is positioned as the study taking place when consultation/guidance from extramural public institutions is not possible, and is expected not actively to be extended beyond the necessary period of non-attendance; here we see an emphasis on the guarantee of rights via attendance, and/or on enrollment premised on attendance.

In addition, from the viewpoint of this MEXT policy with its focus on “return to an Article 1 school = attendance,” along with the current basic legal framework, it is possible to interpret Article 13 of the Educational Opportunity Guarantee Act, “diverse and appropriate study activities carried out by non-attending students in extramural spaces,” which recognizes the importance of this focus, as using “appropriate” to refer only to the limited cases in which students are assumed to be returning to Article 1 schools and the study activities are “appropriate” in comparison with school education.¹⁸ Here we see a strong orientation (policy) toward maintaining the framework of “Japan-style public education”¹⁹ in the guarantee of the right to general education through attendance/enrollment in Article 1 schools. However, this hardline policy also reveals the contradiction that the status quo—in which 39.9% of [non-attending] students are “considered in attendance” through consultation and guidance at extramural institutions²⁰—is making it more difficult for this policy to fulfill the obligation that should be its priority, to guarantee the right to general education.

(2) The status quo of the guarantee of educational opportunities for non-attending students

A general understanding of the nationwide status of non-attending students is made possible by MEXT’s “Results of the Survey on Private-Sector Organizations/institutions Attended by Children of Compulsory Education Age Not Attending Elementary or Junior High Schools” (2015). This document is based on a questionnaire distributed to 474 private-sector organizations and institutions such as free schools, with 319 responses (response rate 67.3%). One of the important facts therein is that a total of 4,196 elementary and junior high school students were (as of the survey) registered with these 319 institutions, just 3.3% of the 125,991 students considered not in attendance (including national, public, and private schools) as of the same year.²¹ Even when this percentage is augmented by the number of non-attending students (likewise) registered with public educational support centers (18,117²², for a total of 22,313), the result is only 17.7% of all non-attending students, suggesting that the majority of these students are not receiving organizational, continuous study support. That is, most non-attending students are thought to be spending their time at home or in similar contexts, without receiving sufficient study support.²³ For all they are the majority, given the failure to grasp sufficiently their life and study status or to provide appropriate study support, etc., this constitutes insufficient fulfillment of the highest-priority duty of the educational authorities, that is to say the equal guarantee of the right to education (equal opportunities for education). The numbers and scale of non-attending students in this situation have now be-

come far too large to overlook.

As regulated in Article 26 of the Constitution, the primary obligation of guaranteeing rights is impingent upon parents. However, when parents and households are faced with complex, interrelated issues of their own in addition to employment, simply calling on them to carry out their enrollment obligation is—as shown by the situation above—unlikely to solve the problem. In fact, the main factor in non-attendance was indicated for 22.0% of elementary schoolers and 12.3% of junior high schoolers in 2019 as “household situation,”²⁴ showing that a number of households (parents) are struggling to fulfill their enrollment obligation. As well, related thereto, attention to the socioeconomic backgrounds of households (parents), such as poverty, as a factor in non-attendance has revealed the need for support for these contexts as well as the children’s psychological needs.²⁵ Based on this status quo, the design of a system and arrangement of conditions for the guarantee of rights must take into account the “weakness as the person responsible” of the parents tasked with the primary responsibility for this guarantee.

(3) The significance and limitations of designated schools for non-attending students

As we have noted above, registration/“attendance” at extramural institutions such as educational support centers or free schools is also significantly restricted. In this context, designated schools for non-attending students have been established in order to guarantee educational and study opportunities suited to the situations of non-attending students, within the framework of Article 1 schools. Work toward the organization and enrichment of these schools is also obligated by Article 10 of the Educational Opportunity Guarantee Act. Their future progress is a matter of widespread interest.²⁶

Designated schools for non-attending students, if assumed to be based on the principles of the Constitution and Basic Act on Education and the objectives of the School Education Law, have a single standard for their curricula: consideration for the actuality of non-attending students.²⁷ While these designated schools are an approach to handling non-attending students within the framework of “Japan-style public education,” premised on attendance at Article 1 schools through special accommodations such as these curricula, they are also one response to the question of the conditions of public education (large-group face-to-face classes, the relativization of physical attendance, etc.). For example, Gifu Municipal Soujun Junior High School,²⁸ which opened in 2021, has drawn up individual curricula in an attempt to optimize individual learning, providing diverse learning opportunities such as individual study using ICT devices (online study from home). Specifically, an example of study for students largely interested in study from home would involve (physically) attending school about once every two weeks to discuss learning progress, while otherwise basically studying at home and/or online. As well, this school also works in close cooperation with the Gifu City Child and Adolescent Support Center.²⁹

However, designated schools for non-attending students also operate under a significant restriction: only non-attending students may enroll and enter, meaning that other students are not able to avail themselves of special curricula.³⁰ In other words, as of now, while an orientation toward the individual optimization of learning is appearing in the GIGA School Program and so on, with the exception of non-attending students, the guarantee of rights remains premised on (physical) attendance and (large-group) face-to-face classes. However, because non-attending status is certified by elementary schools, etc., or management organizations

(Boards of Education, etc.),³¹ the breadth of this certification may expand (or contract) to include the possibility of adaptation to flexible enrollment formats including online study. As well, this certification may—in the case of aspiring enrollment beyond capacity—become, effectively, a form of selection.

That said, since the enactment of the Educational Opportunity Guarantee Act, the number of non-attending students has risen steeply;³² in the current climate, with needs expected to increase for designated schools for non-attending students as a Board of Education countermeasure based on this law, demands for diverse and individual learning including study at home (without physical attendance) are likely to arise along with calls for the organization, examination, and assessment of educational/learning environments making use of ICT to respond thereto.

4. Relativization of attendance during the COVID-19 crisis and new potentials for the guarantee of opportunities for general education

(1) Expansion of online study and classes

Amid the spread of the novel coronavirus from late 2019 on, expectations for a new infrastructure guaranteeing opportunities for general education were heightened by the potentials of online study and classes. For example, during the crisis period, public school teachers spontaneously launched a project examining the education of the future through online classes, with a total of some 2,800 participants in just a month and a half as of April 2020, of whom more than half were apparently public elementary or junior high school teachers.³³

In addition, when the Kumamoto City Board of Education launched online classes for third-graders and up from April 2020 on, some non-attending students commented that while school attendance was not possible for them, they were able to participate in online classes. After the schools reopened, the Board of Education notified schools that they were to live-stream classes as requested, so that non-attending students could make use of them as well. MEXT likewise pointed out that “in general terms, the introduction of information/communication technology (ICT) is effective to ensure learning opportunities for non-attending students,” adding that “while the contexts of municipalities vary, they are to take measures within the scope of possibility.”³⁴

(2) Demands for a shift in vision from the “dichotomies” of “Reiwa-era Japan-style school education”

As noted above, as online study and classes using ICT emerged in various regions at the prompting of the COVID-19 crisis, the Central Council for Education³⁵ released the “Toward the Construction of ‘Reiwa-Era Japan-Style School Education’: Realizing Individual and Collaborative Learning, Evoking the Potential of Every Child” report on January 26, 2021. Defining the “Reiwa-era Japan-style school education” to be attained as “the realization of individually optimized and collaborative learning, evoking the potential of every child,” this report indicates as the directionality of its reforms that “attention is required in order to avoid falling victim to the so-called dichotomies, such as large-group classes versus individual study, merit-based versus age-based promotion, digital versus analog, remote/online versus face-to-face/offline, and so on,” stating that “the attitude taken should be one of willingness

to suitably combine and make the best use of the best parts of both sides, according to developmental stages and learning contexts.”³⁶ As well, in the course of “(1) enhancing the quality, diversity, and inclusiveness of school education and realizing equal opportunities for education,” the report notes the importance of “guaranteeing opportunities for effective learning for children currently unable to settle into school education, including the use of ICT and collaboration with related institutions.”³⁷ Specifically, the report proposes (once again) “ensuring diverse educational opportunities such as the use of ICT at home”³⁸ for non-attending students.

To sum up, the report states that individually optimized and collaborative learning must be developed through positioning ICT as a platform supporting the future of school education and hybridizing face-to-face instruction and remote/online education.³⁹ This directionality can be considered a positive approach to remedying the “pitfall” previously indicated in the guarantee of opportunities for general education in Japan premised on “attendance.” However, we must note that the use of this kind of remote/online education targets “children currently unable to settle into school education,” without actively positioning “non-(physical) attendance” at Article 1 schools to which the obligation of enrollment applies within the guarantee of opportunities for general education.

5. Expanding the concept of enrollment through the separation of enrollment and attendance

Online study and education, which have made progress due to the COVID-19 crisis, are positioned as an important issue of future school education in the CCE report as well. Based on the reality and policy of the increasing relativization of attendance, the fulfillment of the enrollment obligation via the expansion of the concept of enrollment (enrollment via non-physical attendance) has been categorized, as shown in Table 1, according to the combination of physical/non-physical attendance and Article 1/non-Article 1 schools.

Table 1 Categorization of the fulfillment of the enrollment obligation (guarantee of opportunities for general education)

	Physical attendance	Non-physical attendance
Article 1 school	(1) ((1)')	(2)
Non-Article 1 school	(3)	(4)

Source: Created by the author

[Categories shown in Table 1]

- (1) Enrollment obligation at Article 1 schools premised on physical attendance
- (1)' Fulfillment of the enrollment obligation at Article 1 schools premised on physical attendance, including “considered to be attending” status for non-attending students and online study at designated schools for non-attending students (status quo of the guarantee of opportunities for general education)
- (2) Enrollment with non-physical attendance, not premised on physical attendance, recognized without restriction to non-attending students
- (3) Expansion of the Article 1 school framework targeting the enrollment obligation premised

on physical attendance (establishment of an official accreditation system for free schools, etc., in order to achieve “considered to be attending” status ((1)’)

- (4) Inclusion of non-physical attendance non-Article 1 schools (including households), not premised on physical attendance, in the enrollment obligation (shift to an educational obligation system including the online study provided by non-Article 1 schools, homeschooling, etc.)

Of the five categories in Table 1, Japan’s current status quo, while officially (1), is actually (1)’ as a way of handling non-(physical) attendance. In fact, the adoption of category (2) has continued to involve significant caution. That is, even the previously cited CCE report does not take into account category (2). As well, with regard to category (3), efforts in response to the enactment of the Educational Opportunity Guarantee Act are continuing in order to guarantee the uniqueness of free schools while also ensuring their publicness, such as developmental research aimed at the self-assessment, mutual assessment, and third-party assessment of free schools, etc.⁴⁰

MEXT policies to date and the CCE report quoted above share a directionality toward carrying out the enrollment obligation as in category (1)’ and ensuring more solidly opportunities for general education through online study (ICT, etc.). However, with category (2) in mind, the more online study is put to use to guarantee opportunities for non-attending students within category (1)’, the greater the responsibility to answer the question of why these flexible study opportunities cannot be permitted to other students, as well as that of why category (4), including the online study programs provided by non-Article 1 schools (such as Kadokawa Dwango’s N Junior High division) and homeschooling, is not recognized. However, the CCE report may assume that problems like those above have been mitigated by flexibility in learning time, space, and group format, through significant steps toward the realization of individually optimized learning.

Elsewhere, if premised on category (1)’, the status quo of the guarantee of opportunities for general education, the treatment of online participation in classes by non-attending students as attendance is presumably the most definite way to achieve considered attendance on guidance records, since this online “attendance” constitutes participation in classes at Article 1 schools. Therefore, the arrangement of conditions enabling online attendance to be viewed as equivalent to physical attendance should take priority to begin with.⁴¹

6. Current issues of the guarantee of opportunities for general education

The realization of the guarantee of diverse and flexible study opportunities afforded by “individually optimized learning” is an unknown at this time; its issues must be considered carefully. Given the existing record, the relativization of attendance through online study and classes is likely to be called on to resolve issues and improve the situation: at this moment, in various contexts, there are students to whom opportunities for education premised on (physical) attendance at Article 1 schools are not sufficiently guaranteeing the right to general education. While this paper has focused so far on non-attending students in this position, the guarantee of opportunities for general education in Japan, which has always considered “attendance” and “enrollment” inseparable, involves various issues other than non-attendance. Here, with regard to the prospects of the guarantee of opportunities for general education at-

tained through separating “attendance” and “enrollment” and relativizing “attendance” at specific schools, let us examine (1) first-language and first-culture education for students in need of Japanese-language instruction, who are increasing in number and diversifying, and (2) the collaboration of local communities with small-scale schools (in regions with decreasing population), which are the main targets of “rationalization” (school mergers and closings) of class and school sizes, as the population overall decreases.

(1) Guaranteeing opportunities for first-language/first-culture education for students in need of Japanese-language instruction

Students in need of Japanese-language instruction are those who “cannot sufficiently conduct everyday conversation in Japanese” or “can conduct everyday conversation but lack the Japanese language capacity for study appropriate to their grade, hampering their participation in learning activities and in need of Japanese-language instruction.”⁴² As of 2018, these students numbered 51,126 (including those with Japanese nationality), a 150% increase over the past decade and the highest number to date.⁴³ Further, their first languages are increasingly diverse as well, including Portuguese, Chinese, Filipino, Spanish, Vietnamese, and more. As well, while 931 municipalities (53.3%) are now home to public elementary and junior high school students in need of Japanese-language instruction, a majority, only 29.3% of schools have these students enrolled (8,377 schools). Of the 2,204 schools (26.3%) with five or more of these students, just 13 have 100 or more, indicating that scattering and clustering are increasing simultaneously across Japan.⁴⁴ In response, along with the possibility of organizing a “special curriculum” for special instruction suited to Japanese-language ability, various initiatives are taking place such as the development of cutting-edge programs intended to resolve the issues of both “scattered” and “clustered” regions, aimed at students requiring Japanese-language instruction.⁴⁵

However, based on the statistics for AY2017 on high school students requiring Japanese-language instruction with regard to dropouts and career paths, the various policies and projects currently in place in Japan are in need of serious reexamination. Among these students, the dropout rate was 9.6% (1.3% among all high school students), the rate of university entrance was 42.2% (71.1% likewise), the rate of employment in non-regular positions was 40.0% (4.3% likewise), and the rate of those neither going on to further study nor in employment was 18.2% (6.7% likewise).⁴⁶ While it remains unclear whether these high school students in need of Japanese-language instruction as elementary and junior high schoolers, not to mention the family backgrounds and learning environments in which they grew up and what kind of support they may have received, making a definite statement on the effect of various policies⁴⁷ difficult, we may say that the guarantee of opportunities for education in Japan for students in need of Japanese-language instruction remains a major issue.

Given this status quo, the CCE report discussed above⁴⁸ notes that “along with supporting the establishment of children’s identities and cultivating their self-esteem, further support for study of their first languages and first cultures is required in order to contribute to the formation of family relations.” It also mentions that in order for non-Japanese students to form their identities and acquire Japanese, “the acquisition of first languages and first cultures is important.” The importance of the first language in second-language acquisition is derived from Jim Cummins’ theory of interdependence⁴⁹, indicating the intent to learn from the out-

comes of practice and research concerning second language acquisition and improved academic ability therein through use of and education in the first language, as developed in the US and Canada. However, amid the existing policies with their lack of emphasis on first languages and first cultures, the missing piece in the dropouts and career paths of high school students in need of Japanese-language education, as noted above, may be those who chose not to enter high school to begin with, or were unable to do so, because of the failure to guarantee sufficient educational opportunities, including first-language education.

Based on the fundamental attitude of the CCE report and the directionality of the policies, as well as the scattered/clustered situation of students currently in need of Japanese-language instruction, the guarantee of education in their first languages and first cultures could potentially be provided through the guarantee of opportunities for education and study support using ICT. For example, the first-language/first-culture education promoted and developed largely in clustered regions could be provided to schools in scattered regions, with especially limited experience and human resources, through online connection and collaboration. Alternately, while enriching first-language instruction at hub schools established for enriched instruction for students in need of Japanese-language education, online instruction for students unable to attend the hub schools is also a likely possibility.

(2) Rationalization of class and school sizes at small-scale schools

As noted above, the postwar Japanese government determined the standards for class sizes, based on the enrollment obligation system premised on attendance, aiming to fairly guarantee a given standard of educational conditions through the allocation of teachers in accordance with class numbers. However, amid the decreasing birthrate and increasing concentration of the population in urban areas, school mergers and closings have increased likewise. In many of these cases, class and school sizes have been forced into “optimization,” with small schools “below optimal scales” merged or closed, forcing students to commute long distances. However, Japan’s guarantee of opportunities for general education premised on attendance means that sufficient consideration is required for the mental and physical burdens of long-distance commuting, the limitations placed on extracurricular activities, etc. As well, as indicated by the newly compulsory effort to establish School Management Councils (Act on the Organization and Operation of Local Educational Administration Article 47-5-1), school management open to the local community is called for, to which physically large local communities, as the prerequisites for school management, may pose stumbling blocks. Further, the preservation or otherwise of elementary and junior high schools has major effects on regions with decreasing population; in fact, the mergers and closings (scale optimization) of small local schools can become a “political issue” in regional educational administration.⁵⁰

Based on the above conditions, when considering class organization and learning formats, we must reconsider what scale of class and school is in fact “optimal” for students. This reconsideration ought to include, as pointed out here, the format of the guarantee of opportunities for general education which relativizes attendance: that is, rather than insisting upon standards (optimums) of class or school scale premised on attendance at specific schools, we must actively reconsider the organization of an ICT educational environment and the guarantee through its use of diverse learning opportunities, realizing learning groups in various formats. This concept is shared in, for instance, the report of the Miyoshi City Committee to Discuss School Scale Optimization (Hiroshima Prefecture), “On the Optimization of

the Scale and Location of Miyoshi Municipal Elementary and Junior High Schools” (March 2021). The Committee, having been questioned by the superintendent of education on “Items Concerning the Optimization of the Scale and Location of Miyoshi Municipal Elementary and Junior High Schools (*Optimization of School Scale and Location in the Age of ICT),” responded with regard to class and school scale and school location, based on the practice and outcomes of the integrated elementary-junior high education conducted in all Miyoshi City junior high school districts, that “school scale and location should be optimized through the active use of ICT.”⁵¹ Specifically, “school scale should be realized from the perspective of guaranteeing each child an abundant educational environment, not within conventional fixed learning groups, but through the organization of flexible learning groups beyond the frameworks of class, grade, or school, via the active use of ICT suited to the learning purpose and effects, cross-grade interchange, mutual learning with parents and local residents, etc.”; they proposed that “for instance, in smaller classes, presentations of learning outcomes can take place online jointly with other schools’ (smaller) classes.”⁵² This report, while sharing its basic attitude with the CCE report cited above, deserves recognition for its aim, along with enriching schools open to and in concert with the community through integrated elementary-junior high education,⁵³ to create a new and more abundant regional educational environment by forming various learning groups through continuous, everyday collaboration with other schools and the community, based in online connections, without clinging to fixed learning groups (classes) at (specific) schools involving physical attendance.

7. Reconstruction and prospects of the system of guaranteeing opportunities for general education

(1) Diverse approaches to the “pitfalls” of the guarantee of opportunities for general education

Above, this paper has discussed the institutional limitations (pitfalls) of the guarantee of opportunities for general education premised on the enrollment obligation of parents and the attendance of the children under their guardianship at (Article 1) schools, as well as the need to address the issues of this guarantee by relativizing attendance at specific schools, based on the development of online study and education during the COVID-19 crisis, through separating enrollment and attendance and making use of ICT. However, the “pitfalls” of this guarantee in Japan cannot be so easily overcome; there is, in fact, nothing for it but to approach the issues with a combination of assorted policies. In other words, approaches to each of the five categories shown in Table 1 “Categorization of the fulfillment of the enrollment obligation (guarantee of opportunities for general education)” must be considered, with the exception of (1), the status quo. As already noted, national and MEXT policies employ remote/online education for “children currently unable to settle into school education”; to “(2) recognize enrollment with non-physical attendance, not premised on physical attendance, without restriction to non-attending students,” accumulated practice and assessment of designated schools for non-attending students will be required. As well, regarding “(3) expansion of the Article 1 school framework targeting the enrollment obligation premised on physical attendance,” one feasible example is the “schoolification” of free schools, using the system of designated schools for non-attending children (shifting to (1)); as well, initially, steady prepara-

tion of conditions and improvement of social perception will be required to establish systems of public accreditation and evaluation (shifting to (1)') for free schools expected to function as “considered attendance.” However, regarding “(4) inclusion of non-physical attendance non-Article 1 schools, not premised on physical attendance, in the enrollment obligation,” significant problems remain: the guarantee of the quality of the online education provided by non-Article 1 schools, the avoidance of the dismantling or weakening of public education through the marketization/privatization of education, and with regard to homeschooling conducted through a shift from an enrollment obligation (school enrollment obligation) to an education obligation, the ensuring of publicness and consideration for the “weakness of the parents” who will be centered therein.

(2) The relativization of attendance at specific schools and the role of Boards of Education in the guarantee of opportunities for general education

In this way, amid the various initiatives regarding the guarantee of opportunities for general education, how are we to approach the roles of public schools, which constitute a majority of the Article 1 schools forming the normative system, and of the municipal Boards of Education which establish them? Based on the conditions given in this paper, these roles are to promote the diversification of public schools (public education) and therein to realize the establishment of a flexible enrollment system not premised on attendance and on schools suited thereto. In other words, municipal Boards of Education are called on to “promote the guarantee of diverse opportunities for general education through rendering the enrollment system more flexible” and to “shift from the guarantee of opportunities for general education through attendance at specific schools to the guarantee thereof through the formation of public school networks.”⁵⁴ Further, the basis for these two tasks will be the ICT (online) educational environment; an important duty of the national and prefectural governments will be the enrichment of the ICT environment as part of the organization of new conditions ensuring rights, given the varying financial resources of municipalities.

(3) “Councils for Guaranteeing Opportunities for General Education and Comprehensive Support Centers (tentative)” at the prefectural level

Even when the promotion of the guarantee of diverse opportunities for general education and the formation of public school networks is made a prerequisite at the level of municipal Boards of Education, significant differences are likely to appear among their public school networks and educational administrative resources. For example, an increase in the number of non-attending students or the first languages of students in need of Japanese-language instruction might encounter, at small-scale schools in particular, insufficient capacity for support and condition improvement. The role of the prefectures, which handle wide-area administration, is important in promoting collaboration among municipalities and enriching support and guidance systems: for instance, first-language/first-culture education support over a wide area for scattered students in need of Japanese-language instruction, the guarantee of opportunities for (general) education for non-attending elementary and junior high schoolers with an eye to their enrollment in and graduation from prefectural high schools or private high schools under the jurisdiction of prefectural authorities, etc.

In order to guarantee various opportunities for general education continuously through elementary and junior high school via wide-area collaboration among municipalities, prefec-

tural-level “Councils for Guaranteeing Opportunities for General Education and Comprehensive Support Centers (tentative)” might be established. These councils would be composed of the governor, the prefectural Board of Education, municipal Boards of Education, private-sector educational organizations such as free schools, and so on; they would debate and provide comprehensive support for the networking of municipal Boards of Education’s public school networks within the prefecture (wide-area network formation), handling of various educational administrative issues through these wide-area networks, the promotion of the guarantee of the quality of diverse (general) educational opportunities outside public schools (organization and promotion of public accreditation and assessment systems for free schools, etc.) and of collaboration with public schools, gathering information on various educational opportunities in municipalities and providing this information to parents along with consultations and advice, and so on. As children and young people who are struggling would require comprehensive support with regard to welfare and health care as well as education, these Councils would be called on to realize the guarantee of opportunities for general education based on the guarantee of life, through collaboration with prefectural Local Support Network Systems for Children and Young People.^{55, 56}

8. Conclusion

This paper has examined, with regard to the guarantee of opportunities for general education premised on the enrollment obligation at Article 1 schools, the prospects for a new system for this guarantee created by separating enrollment and attendance and relativizing attendance at specific schools. Its proposals include, for municipal Boards of Education, the relativization of attendance at specific public schools, the recognition of online attendance, and the creation and guarantee of diverse educational opportunities through the networking of public schools, and for prefectures, the creation of “Councils for Guaranteeing Opportunities for General Education and Comprehensive Support Centers (tentative)” in order to create wide-area networks from these public school networks and to provide support and to gather and provide information toward resolving various issues based thereon. However, this paper has only suggested an overview and framework of a new system for the guarantee of opportunities of general education; there are still many issues to address, such as the question of the protection of students’ and parents’ personal information and the relationships with existing organizations. From here on, while envisioning the establishment of these Councils and Centers, research must address the reality and issues of the collaboration between schools/Boards of Education and Local Support Network Systems for Children and Young People along with the initiatives taking place overseas.⁵⁷

Notes

- 1 Correspondence high schools are high schools with “curricula conducted via correspondence” (School Education Law Article 4-1); unlike credit-based schools, classes (whether day or night-time) generally do not involve physical attendance. As well, wide-area correspondence high schools are those able to enroll not only students resident in their own prefecture but those in two or more others (School Education Law Article 54-3).
- 2 For example, N High School (<https://nnn.ed.jp>; last accessed June 30, 2021) is a wide-area correspondence high school opened in 2016 by Kadokawa Dwango Gakuen, which conducts education

- online via ICT.
- 3 For example, N Junior High School (<https://n-jr.jp>; last accessed June 30, 2021) is a non-Article 1 school established and operated by Kadokawa Dwango Gakuen, which also runs N High School; its learning environment is based on the use of ICT.
 - 4 As the total number of high school students decreases, (wide-area) correspondence high schools not premised on (physical) attendance show an increase in student numbers of about 9% from 2006 to 2020 (182,517 to 206,948 students) (MEXT, “Gakko Kihon Chosa (School Basic Survey),” 2006, 2020). As well, N High School has 19,732 students as of May 2021, in its fifth year of operation (including students at S High School, opened in April 2021).
 - 5 MEXT, *GIGA School Koso no Jitsugen e (Toward Realization of the GIGA School Program)* (https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20200625-mxt_syoto01-000003278_1.pdf, last accessed July 17, 2021)
 - 6 MEXT Director-General, Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau, “Futoko jido seito e no shien no arikata ni tsuite (Tsuchi) (Support for Children Not Attending School (Notice)),” October 25, 2019 (Former MEXT Elementary Education No. 698).
 - 7 To confirm once again, the Japanese Constitution includes in its “freedoms and rights guaranteed to the people by this Constitution” (Article 12) the right to receive education, as indicated in Article 26. That is, the right to receive education is “guaranteed”; in contrast thereto, the Educational Opportunity Guarantee Act regulates the “ensuring” of “educational opportunities.” To enlarge thereon, if the educational opportunities ensured in the Educational Opportunity Guarantee Act are taking place at non-Article 1 schools, they are not considered to be an opportunity guaranteeing the right to education. Only Article 1 schools can guarantee this right (can provide opportunities guaranteeing the right to education). Thus, the Educational Opportunity Guarantee Act is inevitably premised on “Article 1-ism” (Miyaguchi Seiya, “Shugaku gimusei no saiko (Reconsidering the enrollment obligation system)” in Omomo Toshiyuki & Seto Hirofumi ed., *Nihon-gata kokyoiku no saikento: Jiyu, hoshu, sekinin kara kangaeru (Reconsidering Japan-style public education: Beginning with freedom, guarantees, and responsibility)*, Iwanami Shoten, 2020, p. 42).
 - 8 Guidance records are records of student learning prepared by the principal, which must be sent on when students transfer schools or move on to higher schools (Article 24, Regulations for the Enforcement of the School Education Law). Guidance records include attendance records; however, a student receiving guidance/advice at educational support centers, etc., can be listed as considered present in the guidance records at the principal’s discretion, even if absent from their school of registration (MEXT Director-General, Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau, op. cit. Appendix 1 “Treatment of attendance in guidance records when non-attending students at the compulsory education level are receiving advice/guidance at extramural public institutions or private-sector facilities”).
 - 9 Educational support centers (adaptation guidance classrooms) refer to organizations established by the Board of Education and governing authorities in order to provide organized and planned individual counseling, group guidance, and subject instruction in extramural locations or spare school classrooms, in collaboration with the schools of registration in order to support the return to school life (MEXT “‘Kyoiku shien center (tekio shido kyoshitsu) ni kansuru jittai chosa’ kekka (Results of the ‘Survey on the state of educational support centers (adaptation support classrooms)),’” May 13, 2019).
 - 10 However, in fact non-attending students are permitted to graduate even when they are not “considered to be attending” and their right to receive education has not been guaranteed.
 - 11 For example, Omomo Toshiyuki “Gakko kyoiku no kyokyu shutai no tayoka to Nihon-gata kokyoiku no henyo (The diversification of the suppliers of school education and the transformations of Japan-style public education)” in Omomo & Seto op. cit., pp. 15-38; Sadahiro Saiko, “Kyoiku shutai no tayoka ni taisuru kozaisei shishutsu no kokyosei kakuho: Seido sekkei no kanten kara (Ensuring the publicness of public financial outgo with regard to the diversification of educating bodies: From the point of view of system design),” *Kyoikugaku kenkyu (Educational Studies)*

Vol. 85 No. 2, 2018, pp. 26-38.

- 12 Students in need of Japanese-language instruction are those whose Japanese-language ability is not sufficient for everyday conversation, or who can handle everyday conversation but have insufficient language ability for study at their grade level and/or whose participation in study activities is difficult (MEXT Education Policy Bureau, Gender Equality, Cohesive Society Learning and Safety Division, “‘Nihongo shido ga hitsuyo na jido seito no ukeire jokyo to ni kansuru chosa (Heisei 30-nendo)’ no kekka ni tsuite (Results of the ‘Survey on the status of acceptance of students in need of Japanese-language instruction (AY2018)’,” 2020, p.1)
- 13 In Japan, municipalities and prefectures establish Boards of Education as regional educational administration institutions. Boards of Education determine important items and basic policy concerning educational administration, independent from mayors of municipalities/governors of prefectures, as council-system executive organs; based thereon, the superintendent of education carries out clerical work. The Board of Education is composed of the superintendent and, in general, four Board members, who are appointed by the mayor or governor with the approval of the assembly. The superintendent’s term is 3 years and the members’ terms 4 years. Municipal Boards of Education establish and manage elementary and junior high schools at the compulsory education level; prefectural Boards of Education mainly establish and manage high schools.
- 14 MEXT Notice No. 2 (Notice on Situations in which Enrollment as in Article 2-3 of the Act for Guaranteeing the Opportunity of Receiving Education equivalent to General Education at the Compulsory Grades is Difficult)
- 15 Free schools in Japan are generally private-sector facilities which provide non-attending students with study support, educational consultations, experiential activities and so on. Because they are not so-called Article 1 schools as defined in Article 1 of the School Education Law, entry, matriculation, or attendance at free schools does not constitute fulfillment of the parental obligation for enrollment. As well, they are established and operated based on private-sector autonomy and independence, with highly diverse scales and activity content.
- 16 Nighttime junior high schools were established in affiliation with regular junior high schools in the late 1940s, in order to provide opportunities for compulsory education to school-age students who were compelled to go to work in or outside their own households during the day in the chaotic postwar period. These schools are called on to fulfill various roles in order, effectively, to guarantee the opportunity for compulsory education to those who aged out without completing their education, those who graduated from junior high school without sufficient education due to non-attendance, non-Japanese students, and so on. The Educational Opportunity Guarantee Act of 2016 makes it mandatory for all local governments to take measures to provide enrollment opportunities such as nighttime junior high schools (MEXT, *Yakan chugaku no setchi/jujitsu ni mukete (Tebiki) (Toward the establishment and enrichment of nighttime junior high schools (Guidebook)*, 2nd edition, 2018, p.1).
- 17 MEXT Director-General, Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau, Appendix 1 (op. cit.), Appendix 2 Futoko jido seito ga jitaku ni oite ICT to wo katsuyo shita gakushu katsudo wo okonatta baai no shido yorokujo no shukketsu no toriatsukai ni tsuite “Treatment of attendance in guidance records for non-attending students involved in learning activities at home via ICT, etc.”.
- 18 Under these “limits,” compliance with the Educational Opportunity Guarantee Act and the Notice mentioned above is worked out.
- 19 Omomo Toshiyuki, “Nihon-gata kokyoiku no saikento no kadai (Issues in the reconsideration of Japan-style public education),” in Omomo & Seto, op.cit., p.1.
- 20 MEXT Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau, Student Affairs Division, “Reiwa gannendo jido seito no mondai kodo/futoko to seito shido jo no shokadai ni kansuru chosa kekka ni tsuite (Results of the 2019 survey on issues related to student problem behavior/guidance for non-attending students, etc.),” 2020, p. 89.
- 21 Ibid, p. 70.
- 22 MEXT, “‘Kyoiku shien center (tekiou shido kyoshitsu) ni kansuru jittai chosa’ kekka (Results of

- the ‘Survey on educational support centers (adaptation support classrooms)’,” 2015, p.10.
- 23 In the same year (2015), there were 33,895 [non-attending] students (26.9%) who were going without consultation or guidance, etc., at institutions such as educational support centers and private-sector organizations (MEXT Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau, Student Affairs Division, “AY2015 ‘Jido seito no mondai kodo to seito shido jo no shokadai ni kansuru chosa’ kekka (kakuteichi) ni tsuite (Results of the 2015 ‘Survey on issues relating to students’ problem behavior and student guidance’ (definitive values)),” 2017, p. 82).
 - 24 MEXT Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau, Student Affairs Division, op. cit., 2020, p.83.
 - 25 For example, see Iwata Kanae “Futoko mondai ni taisuru seisakuteki taio no genjo to kadai: Tokyo-to no futoko hasseiritsu chiikisa ni taisuru shakai kozoteki yoin ni chumoku shite (Status and issues of policies addressing the non-attendance problem: Focusing on social structural factors in the regional difference in non-attendance within Tokyo,” in *Jinbun gakuho (The Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities)* Vol. 43, 2008, pp. 23-36.
 - 26 As of April 2021, there are 17 designated schools for non-attending students in Japan (8 public, 9 private), with 7 opening (being designated) after the 2016 Educational Opportunity Guarantee Act.
 - 27 Goto Taketoshi, “Alternative na kyoiku kikan ni kansuru seisaku doko to curriculum kaihatsu no genjyo: Futoko jido seito wo taisho to suru kyoiku katei tokureiko ni chumoku shite (Policy trends in alternative educational institutions and onsite curriculum development: Focusing on special curriculum schools for non-attending students),” *Ryukyu Daigaku Shogai Gakushu Kyoiku Kenkyu Center Kenkyu Kiyo (Journal of the Education and Research Center for Lifelong Learning, University of the Ryukyus)* No. 8, 2014, p. 44.
 - 28 Gifu Municipal Soujun Junior High School, *School Guide*, May 2021 edition (for students/general audience).
 - 29 The Gifu City Child and Adolescent Support Center was established in order to “provide support for children and young people struggling with daily or social life through comprehensive knowledge of welfare, education, and other related fields, in accordance with their living environments and other contexts, and thus to improve welfare for children and young people and work toward their healthy development and social independence” (https://yell-gifu.jp/?page_id=11, last accessed July 14, 2021).
 - 30 MEXT, “Futoko jido seito no jittai ni hairyo shite tokubetsu ni hensei sareta kyoiku katei ni motozuku kyoiku wo okonau gakko no gaiyo (An overview of schools providing education based on curricula specially configured with consideration for non-attending students),” https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/seitoshidou/1397860.htm, last accessed July 14, 2021). This overview also states that students with discontinuous non-attendance or with non-attending tendencies may also be eligible for designated schools for non-attending students.
 - 31 Ibid.
 - 32 The number of non-attending elementary and junior high school students in 2017, after the enactment of the Educational Opportunity Guarantee Act, was 144,031; in 2019 it was 181,272, an increase of 25.9%. In comparison, the increase over the three years up to 2016 was 8.8% (122,897 in 2014 to 133,683 in 2016) (MEXT Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau, Student Affairs Division, op. cit., 2020, p. 70).
 - 33 “Koritsu demo dekita ‘online jugyo’ no sugoi kanosei: Toko saikai de ‘nakatta koto’ ni shite ii no ka? (The amazing potential of the ‘online classes’ that even public schools managed: can they be ‘ignored’ once students are coming to school again?),” *Toyo Keizai Online*, June 2, 2020 (<https://toyokeizai.net/articles/-/353856>, last accessed July 20, 2021).
 - 34 “‘Online jugyo ha corona riyu ni gentei,’ Fukuoka-shi kyoikui no tsuchi ni futoko no hogosha rakutan (‘Online classes to be limited to COVID-19 needs,’ parents of non-attending students disappointed by notice from Fukuoka City Board of Education),” *Yomiuri Shimbun Online*, June 22, 2020 (<https://www.yomiuri.co.jp/kyoiku/kyoiku/news/20200622-OYT1T50231/>, last accessed July 20, 2021).

- 35 The Central Council for Education (CCE) is an advisory organ for the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, discussing and reporting to the Minister on questions on important issues in the promotion of education, lifelong learning, and so on. The CCE has issued various important reports, with a significant impact on education policy and reforms in Japan.
- 36 CCE report “‘Reiwa no Nihon-gata gakko kyoiku’ no kochiku wo mezashite: Subete no kodomo-tachi no kanosei wo hikidasu, kobetsu saiteki na manabi to, kyodoteki na manabi no jitsugen (Toshin) (Toward the construction of ‘Reiwa-era Japan-style school education’: Realizing individual and collaborative learning, evoking the potential of every child),” January 26, 2021, p. 23.
- 37 Ibid., pp. 23-24.
- 38 Ibid., p. 47.
- 39 Ibid., pp. 75-76.
- 40 MEXT (research group representative: Kase Susumu), “Free school to no shien no arikata ni kansuru chosa kenkyu: Jiko hyoka to sogo hyoka/daisansha hyoka kenkyu hokokusho (Survey research on support for free schools, etc.: Report on self-assessment and mutual/third-party assessment),” 2020.
- 41 Note that while determining how to realize “individually optimized learning,” careful consideration and systemization is required for activities calling for attendance (face-to-face participation) and/or effects on other students, etc.
- 42 MEXT Education Policy Bureau, Gender Equality, Cohesive Society Learning and Safety Division, op. cit., p.1.
- 43 MEXT Education Policy Bureau, Gender Equality, Cohesive Society Learning and Safety Division, “Gaikokujin jido seito to kyoiku no genjo to kadai (Status and issues of education for foreign students, etc.),” 2020, p. 3. In particular, the number of students with Japanese nationality has increased 2.1 times over a decade. (p.4.)
- 44 Ibid., p. 6.
- 45 Ibid., p.16.
- 46 MEXT Education Policy Bureau, Gender Equality, Cohesive Society Learning and Safety Division, “‘Nihongo shido ga hitsuyo na jido seito no ukeire jokyo to ni kansuru chosa (Heisei 30-nendo)’ no kekka ni tsuite (Results of the ‘Survey on the status of acceptance of students in need of Japanese-language instruction (AY2018)’,” op. cit., p. 13.
- 47 When measuring the effects of these policies, national achievement/ability status surveys are also thought to be useful, but the absence of students in need of Japanese-language instruction from surveys has been noted as a point of consideration (MEXT “Reiwa 3-nendo zenkoku gakuryoku/gakushu jokyo chosa ni kansuru jisshi yoryo (Guidelines for conducting the 2021 National Achievement/Ability Status Survey),” December 23, 2020, p.9); this is an important issue in guaranteeing opportunities for general education.
- 48 CCE, op. cit., pp. 69-70, p.75.
- 49 The report (note 101 on p. 75) explains as follows: “Regarding the connection between the first language and second language (Japanese), cognitive and academic abilities therein are said to be held in common (Cummins’ theory of interdependence). Cognitive and academic ability is the ability to think and to render things abstract and general for expression; for children who came to Japan before the age at which these abilities develop (around fifth/sixth grade), either continued mastery of their first language or thorough Japanese study is required to enable the ability to think to develop.”
- 50 In Shobara City, Hiroshima Prefecture, the reorganization (mergers and closings) of municipal elementary and junior high schools drew increasing criticism of the superintendent of education driving the process, leading to confusion in which the mayor temporarily withdrew their support for reappointment of the superintendent (*Chugoku Shimbun Digital*, June 8 & 29, 2021).
- 51 Report of the Miyoshi City Committee to Discuss School Scale Optimization, “Miyoshi shiritsu sho/chugakko no kibo oyobi haichi no tekiseika ni tsuite (Optimization of the scale and location of Miyoshi municipal elementary and junior high schools),” March 2021, p.10.

- 52 Ibid., p.11.
- 53 Integrated elementary-junior high education refers to a shared vision of the goals for children among elementary and junior high school teachers, with a curriculum organized to cover the nine years of the two school stages together with systematic education. This kind of education may be conducted with a single nine-year compulsory education school in which, under one principal, the teaching staff have organized an integrated curriculum, or with organizationally independent elementary and junior high schools which conduct integrated education (MEXT, *Shochu ikkan shita kyoiku katei no hensei/jisshi ni kansuru tebiki (Manual for the organization/execution of an integrated elementary-junior high school curriculum)*, 2016, p.17).
- 54 For example, based on the framework of the current system, designated schools for non-attending students might be established to guarantee learning opportunities through the use of ICT, or based on their outcomes, general public schools might guarantee flexible learning and enrollment formats for those other than non-attending students as well. In addition, Japanese language instruction hub schools might guarantee opportunities online for Japanese-language education and first language/first culture education to students at other schools.
- 55 Local Support Network Systems for Children and Young People are established by local governments based on Article 19 of the Act on Promotion of Development and Support for Children and Young People, as a network providing multi-layered and continuous support for children and young people in difficulties through collaboration with relevant institutions in the region. Based on Article 13 of this law, Child & Youth Counseling Centers established by local governments are one-stop resources offering various consultation services for children and youth, as hubs providing introductions to relevant institutions, other necessary information, and advice (Cabinet Office, *Kodomo/wakamono ikusei shien shisaku no sogoteki suishin (Comprehensive promotion of support and development policies for children and youth)*, 2022).
- 56 Regarding comprehensive support including “out of school” issues, the logic of their justification, the directionality of systemization etc., see Goto Taketoshi, “Gakko gai kyoiku no kokyosei ni kansuru kosatsu: Konnan wo kakaeru kodomo/wakamono e no hokatsuteki shien no kanten kara (Consideration of the publicness of extramural education: From the perspective of comprehensive support for struggling children and youth),” *Nihon Kyoiku Gyosei Gakkai Nenpo (Bulletin of the Japan Educational Administration Society)* Vol. 45, 2019, pp.41-57. From this perspective, the previously mentioned collaboration between Gifu Municipal Soujun Junior High School, a designated school for non-attending students, and the Gifu City Child and Adolescent Support Center is notable as a potential object of research.
- 57 Pioneering research from the viewpoint of this interest includes, for instance, Goto Taketoshi “Beikoku ni okeru alternative kyoiku no koteki governance ni kansuru kosatsu: Konnan wo kakaeta wakamono e no gakushu kikai hoshō no kanten kara (Consideration of public governance in alternative education in the US: From the perspective of guaranteeing learning opportunities to struggling youth),” *Tohoku Daigaku Daigakuin Kyoikugaku Kenkyuka Kenkyu Nenpo (Annual Report, Graduate School of Education, Tohoku University)* Vol. 67 No. 1, 2018, pp.79-92.