

1.About School Education in Japan

(1) School Education System

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Japanese Education System Chart

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Education Before Starting School

Before starting school, children aged 3 and up to school age can receive education in kindergartens.

Compulsory Education

Compulsory education at elementary and lower secondary schools is for children aged from 6 to 15 (for a total of nine years).There are also special schools (elementary and lower secondary departments) for the blind, the deaf and children with intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities and health impairments.

Elementary and Secondary Education

Children enter elementary school (shougakkou) in the April following their 6th birthday and study there for six years. After graduating from elementary school, students enter junior high school (chuugakkou) for a further three years. After junior high school, students have completed their compulsory education. They may then enter senior high school, where they will normally study for an additional three years. There are two types of high schools: One offers regular education while the second offers vocational education. There are also public elementary and junior high schools with classes and resource rooms for students with disabilities, schools for the deaf, the blind and children with intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities and health impairments. In these classes, education is individualized in order to meet the special needs of the students with disabilities. Tuition is free in public elementary and junior high schools, as well as at the elementary and lower secondary level at schools for the deaf and physically or mentally challenged.

Higher Education

Higher education is provided mainly through universities (daigaku) and two-year colleges (tandai). These institutions offer higher level, specialized education. Usually university education lasts for four years while education in junior colleges is for two years. Graduate schools (daigakuin) offer a much higher level of education and students usually study at this level for two to five years.

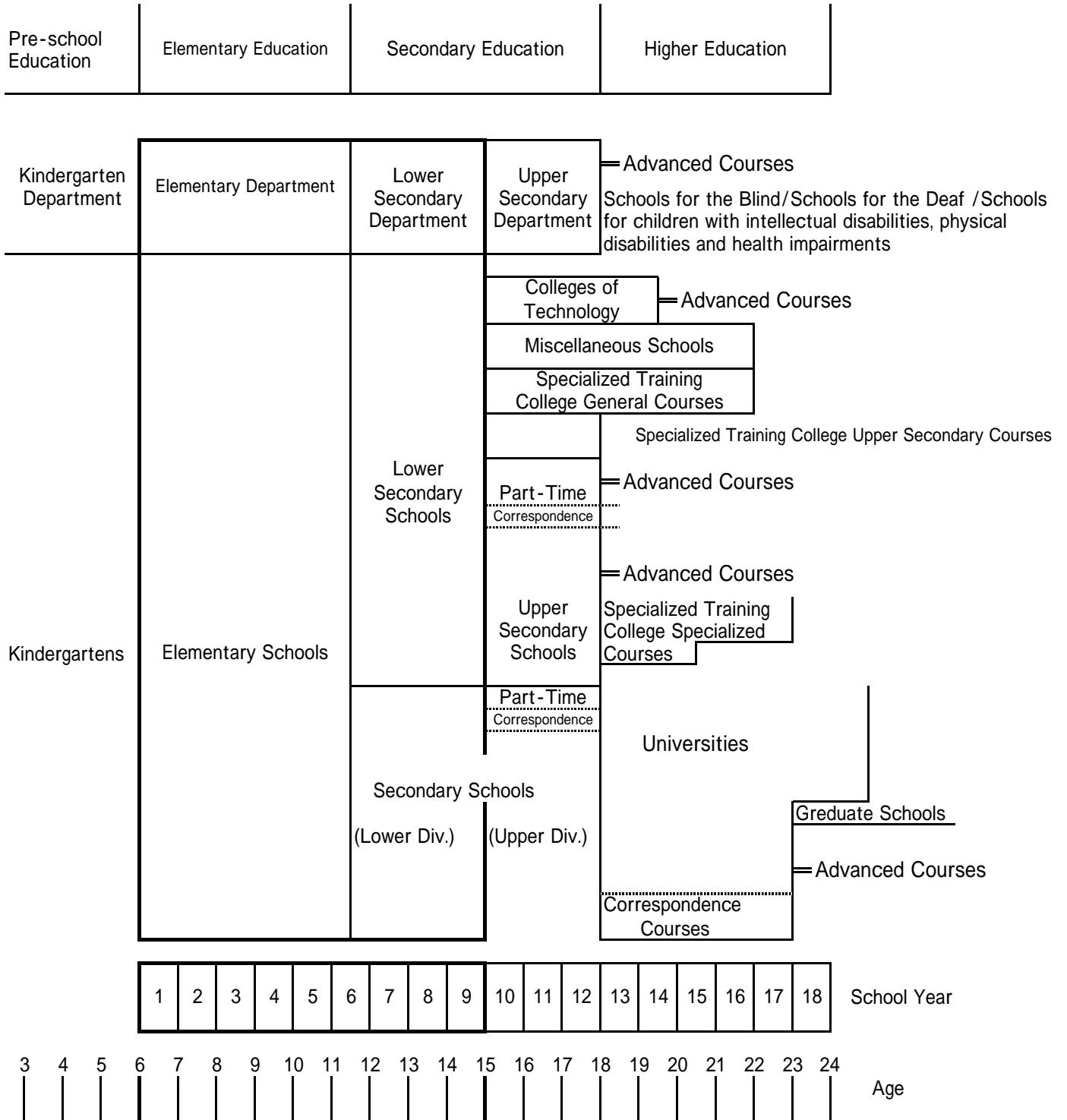
Vocational colleges (senmongakkou) train students in the skills and knowledge necessary for specific occupations. The length of study at these institutions is usually two years.

2) Educational Content

Curriculum

What students study in schools is prescribed in the Courses of Study, which are established by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports Science and Technology. The curriculum of each school consists of various academic subjects, moral education, special activities and integrated studies, etc., based on the Courses of Study.

School Education System



School Subjects

In elementary school pupils study Japanese (kokugo), social studies (shakai), arithmetic (sansuu), science (rika), life studies (seikatsu), music (ongaku), drawing and crafts (zuga kousaku), home economics (katei) and physical education (taiiku). Other subjects such as moral education (doutoku), special activities and integrated studies are also taught.

In junior high school, students study Japanese (kokugo), social studies (shakai), mathematics (suugaku), science (rika), music (ongaku), art (bijutsu), physical education (taiiku), technical arts and home economics (gijutsu katei) and foreign languages (gaikokugo-usually English), etc. Students also study moral education, special activities, and integrated studies.

The language used in elementary and junior high school-including schools that have resource rooms, special classes and schools for children with disabilities-is Japanese.

Textbooks

Textbooks used in elementary and junior high schools, elementary and lower secondary departments of special schools for children with disabilities are free of charge.

However, textbooks are not free for senior high school students and the upper secondary department of special schools for children with disabilities. Senior high school and upper secondary department level students in special schools can receive subsidies from prefectural boards of education.

Some schools may use reference materials in addition to textbooks. These reference books are not provided free of charge.

Grade level promotion and moving from one school level to another

In Japan, there is no system for skipping grades during the compulsory education period. A student advances from one grade to the next. After completing their compulsory education, in order to get into a senior high school, students are usually required to pass an entrance examination.

Financial Assistance

Financial assistance can be received from the board of education of cities (wards in some areas), towns or villages (hereinafter these are referred to as municipal boards of education) for school supplies and school lunches, if it is determined that there is a need for this.

Please contact your local municipal board of education for details.

(2) Public School Teachers

Because of the high quality of teachers in the Japanese education system, public trust of the system is high. Teachers who teach at the elementary, junior or senior high school level are educated at higher education institutions. Therefore, teachers have completed the curriculum for teacher training and become certified as teachers prior to teaching in public schools. Public school teachers are appointed by prefectural boards of education. During their employment, teachers are given various opportunities to enhance their teaching skills.

2. Procedures for Starting School

(1) Procedures for Starting (or transferring to) elementary and junior high school

1) Procedures at City/Ward/Town/Village Hall

Parents / guardians need to go to the City Hall (or the ward, town or village office) to register as foreign residents (alien registration). Parents should inform this office of their desire for their children to attend a Japanese public school. After doing so, they will receive either a “Gaikokujin jidou seito nyuugaku moushikomisho” (School Entrance Application Form for Foreign Children) or a “Shuugaku annai” (Guidance for Entering School Form) in the case of entering a new school. Parents should fill these forms out and submit them.

The “Gaikokujin jidou seito nyuugaku kyokasho” (School Entrance Permission for Foreign Children) will be sent (or handed over at the time of application) to the parents by the local municipal board of education. The form will state the name of the school the child will attend and where it is located.

2) Procedures at the school

Parents / guardians should go to the school with their child / children, taking the “Gaikokujin jidou seito nyuugaku kyokasho” (School Entrance Permission for Foreign Children) with them to discuss the prospective course of their child’s school life with the teachers. In principle, foreign children in Japan should receive exactly the same education as Japanese children.

In Japanese schools, a child’s grade is determined by the student’s age. (Children who are born between April 2nd to April 1st of the following year will be in the same grade.) The Japanese grade might be different from the grade in the student’s home country.

However, when a child’s Japanese language ability is weak, he / she may sometimes be enrolled in a (lower) grade more suitable for his / her language ability.

Depending on the area, there is also the possibility that the child could attend a school (possibly in another district) that has more Japanese language assistance for non-native speakers. Parents should consult the local municipal board of education for more information about such matters.

3) Items necessary for procedures at school

When the child goes to school, the parents / guardians should bring the following documents: student record of enrollment at school in his / her home country, grade records issued by the school, etc., if possible.

At the school, parents will be interviewed on the subjects listed below to help make the child's school life more successful.

- a) • Education the child received before enrolling in the school
 - Expected period of stay in Japan
 - Grade of child in home country and school attendance
 - Japanese language ability of the child(ren) and family

- b) • Name(s) of the child(ren) and other family members
 - Date of birth
 - Current address
 - Family makeup
 - Contact details (emergency contact, workplace contact, interpreter's contact details if necessary, etc.)
 - Means of transportation for going to and from school
 - Health condition (previous illnesses, eyesight, hearing, chronic illnesses, dietary habits, etc.)

(2) Procedures for changing schools within Japan

In cases where there is a need to change schools due to a change of residence within Japan, the parent / guardian should submit a “tengaku todoke” (Transfer Notification – the name of this form and processing methods vary depending on the municipal board of education) to the current school. After submitting this form, the school will issue a “zaigaku shoumeisho”(Certificate of Enrollment) and “kyoukayou tosho kyuuuyo shyoumeisho” (a form showing proof that the student has received textbooks) to the parents. School records and other documents related to the child will be sent from the current to the new school.

When changing wards, cities, towns or villages, at the same time that the family’s “gaikokujin touroku” (Alien Registration) is registered, a “tennyuugaku tsuuchisho” (Transfer Notification Form) or “nyuugaku kyokasho” (Entrance Permission Form) should also be issued. Parents should then go to the new school and submit the “zaigaku shouemisho” (Student Record of Enrollment) and “kyoukayou tosho kyuuuyo shyoumeisho” (a form showing proof that the student has received textbooks).

The parents / guardians should then contact both the municipal board of education and the school.

When planning to transfer schools, please consult with the current school or the municipal board of education.

3 . About School Life

(1)A Day in School

The number of classes students have and the time they leave school each day vary according to the day of the week and the grade. In 6th grade, usually five or six classes are held per day (one class is usually 45 minutes in elementary schools and 50 minutes in junior high schools). There are no classes on Saturdays and Sundays.

In elementary school, the class teacher teaches most regular education subjects. In junior high school, the teacher varies according to the subject.

Lunch Hour (Kyuushoku jikan)

In elementary and junior high schools, in most cases, school lunch is provided as a part of the school's educational activities. School lunches are planned so that students will learn the proper way of eating and suitable or good human relationships. This is done through students setting the table, clearing the table and eating a well-balanced diet while having fun together. In this way, students can learn to live healthily.

Parents / guardians pay for the cost of the ingredients of lunch, and the amount is about 3,500 yen to 4,500 yen a month, depending on the area and grade.

In some junior high schools, school lunches are not provided.

Cleaning Hour (Souji jikan)

In Japanese schools, students share responsibilities for cleaning the classrooms, school grounds, etc.

Club Activities (Bu katsudou)

Those who wish to do so can join athletic or cultural activities after school.

(2) A Year at school

Japanese schools start in April and end in March of the following year. The school year is usually divided into three terms. The following is a list of the main school activities. (Below is an example of a 3-semester school. The type of activities and how and when they are carried out vary from school to school.)

First Term : April July

Opening Ceremony (Shigyō shiki) April

This is a ceremony where students gather to mark the start of the new school year.

Entrance Ceremony (Nyuugaku shiki) April

This is a ceremony to welcome the 1st grade / year students. The students and parents/ guardians usually attend the ceremony and dress formally.

Health Check (Shintai sokutei / Teiki kenkō shindan) April-June

At the health check, a student's height, weight and sitting height are measured. Also, a doctor checks the health of the students.

Athletic Day (Undōkai / Taiikutaikai)

This is an event for students to enjoy exercising by doing activities such as short distance running, relays, ball games and dancing, and by cheering on their classmates. Activities in which students' families can participate are also held in some schools.

School Trips (Shuugaku ryōkō)

Usually in the higher grade levels, everyone in the same grade goes on a trip for a few days.

School Excursions (Ensoku)

These are field trips where students learn about nature, history and culture that they cannot experience in the classroom.

Class Observation / Parent Teacher Conferences (Jūgyō sankan, Kondan kai)

These are opportunities for parents to view classes so that they can get to know how their children are doing in school and exchange opinions and information with their children's teacher(s).

End of the Semester Ceremony (Shūgyō shiki) July

This is a ceremony to declare the end of the first semester.

Summer Holiday (Natsu yasumi) End of July to Middle of August

This is a long break of almost 30 days. Students may be able to join clubs and participate in special school activities.

Second Term : August – December

Opening Ceremony (Shigyou shiki) August

This is a ceremony where students gather to mark the start of the second term.

Music and Drama Appreciation (Ongaku, Engeki kanshoukai)

This assembly is meant to help students grow spiritually through experiencing fine drama and music.

Student Performance and Cultural Festival (Gakugeikai, Bunkasai)

This is an event where students display works made in fine arts, technical arts and home economics classes and social study and science reports for their fellow students to see. Students also put on dramatic and musical performances for each other.

End of the Semester Ceremony (Shuugyou shiki) December

This is a ceremony to declare the end of the second semester.

Winter Holiday (Fuyu yasumi) End of December to the Middle of January

This is a holiday of about three weeks.

Third Term : January – March

Opening Ceremony (Shigyou shiki) January

This is a ceremony where students gather to mark the start of the third term.

Graduation Ceremony (Sotsugyou shiki) March

This is a ceremony to congratulate students on their graduation from the final grade.

End of the Year Ceremony (Shuuryou shiki) March

This is a ceremony not only to declare the end of the third semester, but also the end of the entire school year.

Spring Holiday (Haru yasumi) End of March – Beginning of April

The spring holiday begins right after the end-of-year ceremony. After the spring holiday ends, students go up to the next grade. So, in April, students will be in a higher grade.

National Holidays

On national holidays, Japanese people celebrate, appreciate or commemorate special events. National holidays are school holidays.

January 1 (Ganjitsu) (New Year's Day)	This day celebrates the beginning of the new year.
2nd Monday of January (Seijin no hi) (Coming-of -Age Day)	This ceremony is to acknowledge the entry into adulthood of those turning 20. This celebration is to encourage them as they strive to live their lives.
February 11 (Kenkoku kinenbi) (National Foundation Day)	This is a day to remember the founding of the nation and foster a patriotic attitude towards Japan.
March Vernal Equinox (Shunbun no hi)	This is a day to praise nature and appreciate all living things.
April 29 (Syouwa no hi)	This is a day to remember the Shyouwa era when our country has revived.
May 3 (Kempou kinenbi) (Constitution Day)	This day commemorates the implementation of the Japanese Constitution and expresses hope for the growth of the nation.
May 4 (Midori no hi) (Green Day)	This is a day to become familiar with nature in order to appreciate its benefits and to grow spiritually.
May 5 (Kodomo no hi) (Children's Day)	This is a day to appreciate children's personalities and wish for their happiness, as well as to show appreciation for mothers.
3rd Monday of July (Umi no hi) (Ocean Day)	This is a day to appreciate the benefits found in the sea and to wish for the prosperity of our ocean-bound country.
3rd Monday of September (Keirou no hi) (Day of the Elderly)	This is a day to show respect to the elderly who have contributed to society for many years and to celebrate their longevity.
September Autumnal Equinox (Shuubun no hi)	This is a day of respect for one's ancestors and to remember the dead.
2nd Monday of October (Taiiku no hi) (Health and Sports Day)	This is a day for getting involved in sports and cultivating a healthy mind and body.
November 3 (Bunka no hi) (Culture Day)	This is a day to love freedom and peace and promote culture.
November 23 (Kinrou kansha no hi)	This is a day to appreciate each other's labor and productivity.
December 23 (Tennou tanjoubi) (Emperor's Birthday) (Labor Day)	This day is to celebrate the birthday of the Emperor.

(3)Assessment

School report cards on student's academic record and life at school are sent by the school to the students' families.

(4)Rules and Regulations

Schools have various regulations so that every student can live a healthy and safe life.

In elementary school, usually there are no regulations regarding clothing and belongings. However, as a rule, during physical education students change into comfortable and stretchable clothing.

In junior high school, most schools have their own school uniforms. Students wear comfortable shoes. In the school buildings, as is Japanese custom, students normally change into indoor shoes.

Most schools prohibit manicures and accessories such as piercings.

Usually, a student may not buy and eat snacks in school.

(5)Health and Safety

The school takes care to protect children's health and safety. When a student gets sick or injured, first aid is given in the health center. If necessary, the family or a hospital will be contacted. Also, as determined by law, students are checked yearly by school doctors.

Health Center (Hoken shitsu)

When a student gets sick or injured, a school nurse gives first aid in the health center and, if necessary, will contact a hospital or the family. Also the school nurse monitors students' health and gives health guidance and counselling.

Regular Health Checks (Teiki kenkou shindan)

Various health checks are given to monitor students' health condition. Based on the results, treatment recommendations and health guidance, etc., are given to parents.

• Examinations At School

Height, weight, sitting height, eyesight, hearing, tuberculosis, electro-cardiogram, urinalysis, parasites (not all checks are given to all grades).

- **Examinations by School Doctors**

Internal medicine, eye doctor, ear / nose / throat doctor and dentist.

Vaccination (Yobou sesshu)

Vaccinations can be given as an option at some schools. If they are required, fill out the medical pre-examination form and submit it with a seal. Doctors check the pre-examination form and medical staff perform the vaccinations.

Vaccinations given are for diphtheria, whooping cough (pertussis), tetanus, Japanese encephalitis.

National Agency for the Advancement of Sports and Health:

Disaster Mutual Benefit System (Saigai kyousai kyuufu)

In case of accident or injury at school, a “Casualty Insurance” system is provided by the National Agency for the Advancement of Sports and Health. Parents or guardians pay a part of the premium.

(6) Contacts Between School and Families

There is a group called the PTA that consists of parents / guardians and teachers. This group works together to support education at school.

The group offers activities such as “Experiencing Nature with Parents and Students” and “Safety Guidance for Travelling to and from School,” etc.

4. About Educational Counseling

(1) Educational Counseling in School

In Japanese schools, there are opportunities for educational counseling in which parents / guardians and teachers exchange information about children's issues. Topics such as bullying, refusal to go to school, career guidance, etc., can be discussed. When necessary, an interpreter will be made available.

The following are such opportunities for educational counseling in school.

1 .Home Visitation (Katei houmon)

The class teacher visits the children's home and discusses the child's life at school and at home. This is not done at all schools.

2. Parent / Teacher Meeting (Hogosha kai)

Parents / guardians go to school to listen to the principal and / or talk with the class teacher. Topics often relate to issues common to all the children as a group rather than those of individual children.

3. Individual Interview (Kojin mendan)

This meeting normally takes place between the class teacher and either the child or the parent / guardian. (It can take also place as a threeway discussion including the child, parent and teacher.)

This is a good opportunity to talk about personal problems and concerns. The date is arranged in advance and advised by the class teacher. At some schools, an interpreter may be available for such meetings.

(2) Educational Counseling Outside of School

There are other opportunities for educational counseling. Prefectural and municipal boards of education provide opportunities to consult about children's education on topics such as special support education for children with disabilities, bullying, refusal to go to school, etc.

Educational Consulting by Prefectural / Municipal Governments

Usually, the municipal board of education supervises public elementary and junior high schools. Likewise, the prefectural board of education supervises most public high schools and schools for children with disabilities. So, please go to the respective board of education to consult about such topics.

Some local governments may have special consultations for foreigners, including a child's educational issues as well as general issues. English, Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish and other languages can be used in such consultations.

Educational Consultations Regarding Financial Aid

Financial assistance is available from municipal boards of education. If parents / guardians need financial assistance for their children, they should contact the municipal board of education.

