

Support for Persons with Developmental Disabilities in Japan

Yutaka Tokunaga
Chief Researcher, Department for Policy and Planning, National Institute of Special Education (NISE), Japan

1. Enforcement of “Law to Support Persons with Developmental Disabilities” (April 1, 2005)

The “Law to Support Persons with Developmental Disabilities” (Law number 167 of 2004) was promulgated on December 10, 2004. Based on this Law, “Enforcement Ordinance Relative to the Law to Support Persons with Developmental Disabilities” was promulgated on April 1, 2005. Based on this Ordinance, “Regulations Relative to the Enforcement of the Law to Support Persons with Developmental Disabilities” was promulgated. The Law and the Regulations took effect on April 1, 2005.

Accordingly, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) have notified prefectural governors, heads of cabinet-order designated cities (12 major cities), presidents of national, public and private universities etc. about the contents of these laws and regulations, to ensure appropriate application of the Law by providing the necessary guidance, advice and support.

This notification specifies the Law's outline and purposes. The outline covers 18 topics, which include “Definitions”, “Obligations of the National and Local Governments” and “Collaboration by Related Agencies”.

What all these means is that the Japanese Government has initiated the creation of a system to support persons with developmental disabilities, in addition to the existing systems

to support persons with physical (including motor) and Intellectual disabilities.

1) Definition of “developmental disability”

Section 1 of Article 2 of the Law defines “developmental disability” as follows: “the following disabilities prescribed by the government ordinance and whose symptoms appear in childhood: autism, Asperger's syndromes and other pervasive developmental disorders (PDD), learning disabilities/disorders (LD) and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD) and other similar cerebral dysfunctions”.

2) Education

Concerning education, the Law prescribes as follows. “The national, prefectural and municipal governments shall take the necessary measures for the provision of appropriate educational support including development of the support systems to ensure that persons with developmental disabilities (inclusive of those 18 years of age and older who attend lower and upper secondary schools and schools for the blind, deaf and children with other disabilities) can receive sufficient education in accordance with the state of their disabilities.” It also prescribes for universities and technical colleges to give proper educational consideration in accordance with the state of disabilities.

2. FY 2005 budgets relating to developmental disabilities

Based on the purport of the Law, measures are being expected to be taken to establish commissions to examine developmental disabilities in prefectures and designated cities to provide consistent support in meeting with the life stages of people with developmental disabilities from infancy to adulthood thereby develop the systems for support which include preparation of individual support programs in the regions.

Specifically, the related government agencies are making the following efforts.

1) Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)

“Projects to Promote Special Support Education”

FY 2005 budget: 202.76 million yen

Since fiscal 2003, the MEXT has been implementing measures such as the following to develop comprehensive systems for educational support for children with LD, ADHD, high-functioning autism (HFA) etc. who attend regular elementary and lower secondary schools: establishment of school committees and teams of specialists, training of “special support education coordinators” and peripatetic (visiting) guidance.

Since 2004, the MEXT has added the following projects to further develop the comprehensive systems to support children with disabilities including LD, ADHD and HFA who attend regular elementary and lower secondary schools: establishment of “special support education liaison councils” as cross-administrative agency organizations in prefectures and areas, preparation of individual educational support programs and implementation of researches on the possibility of having special schools serve center functions.

In fiscal 2005, by strengthening the collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the MEXT has expanded the coverage of these projects and programs to kindergartens and upper secondary schools in order to develop a consistent system of support from infancy to employment.

2) Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW)

Initiation of projects to develop systems to support people with developmental disabilities
FY 2005 budget (new): 250 million yen

a. Development of prefectural systems of support

The MHLW will establish a “commission for the examination for the development of systems to support people with developmental disabilities” for examination by the related concerns for the development of a consistent system to support people with developmental disabilities from infancy to adulthood.

b. Development of regional support systems

In designated regions, formation of support networks in such areas as healthcare, medical and welfare services, education and employment, as well as teams to support people with developmental disabilities, to prepare individual support programs for such persons for consistent support from infancy to adulthood.

c. Implementation of model projects for developmental and consultative support

Implementation of model projects such as expert developmental support at facilities for children with disabilities and day service centers for children and consultative support for families, and extension of the outcomes of such

projects to the parties concerned.

- Increase of centers to provide support relating to autism and developmental disabilities (from 20 centers in 2004 to 36 centers in 2005).
- Expenses (new) for extension and information relating to developmental disabilities: extension and education relating to developmental disabilities, preparation and distribution of posters and leaflets for correct understanding.
- Holding of workshops for manpower related with developmental disabilities (National Chichibu-gakuen Institute)

By covering administrators, public health nurses (PHNs), children's nurses etc. to become leaders in the field of developmental disabilities in prefectural governments and designated cities, provision of training on developmental disabilities such as LD and ADHD for the improvement of their knowledge and skills.

3. Guidebook to support students with developmental disabilities

Developmental disabilities require urgent and appropriate measures at universities and technical colleges. For this reason, the NISE has compiled a “Guidebook to Support Students with Developmental Disabilities” in March 2005.

Developmental disabilities are often not “visible” so that people may not recognize them as disabilities. Therefore, the key issues are how to let people understand about persons having such disabilities and how to support such persons in relation to their educational needs and behavioral difficulties.

A survey conducted by the NISE showed that several times more students having developmental disabilities than those having physical disabilities were attending universities

or colleges. Hence required is development and expansion of the support systems by also covering students with developmental disabilities.

At present, elementary and lower secondary schools are stepping up their efforts to find, understand and support children with developmental disabilities. This year's issue is to expand the coverage of the support systems to kindergartens and upper secondary schools. Such children thus supported will be studying in universities or colleges in a few years, at which time it will be the universities' responsibility to provide such students with appropriate support.

The “Guidebook to Support Students with Developmental Disabilities” is believed a key material for college concerns especially those in charge of student counseling to correctly understand developmental disabilities and provide the necessary support. The NISE has also prepared a pamphlet along with the Guidebook. The related report has been published by “The Earth Kyoikushinsha” publishing company in May 2005 (Japanese only).

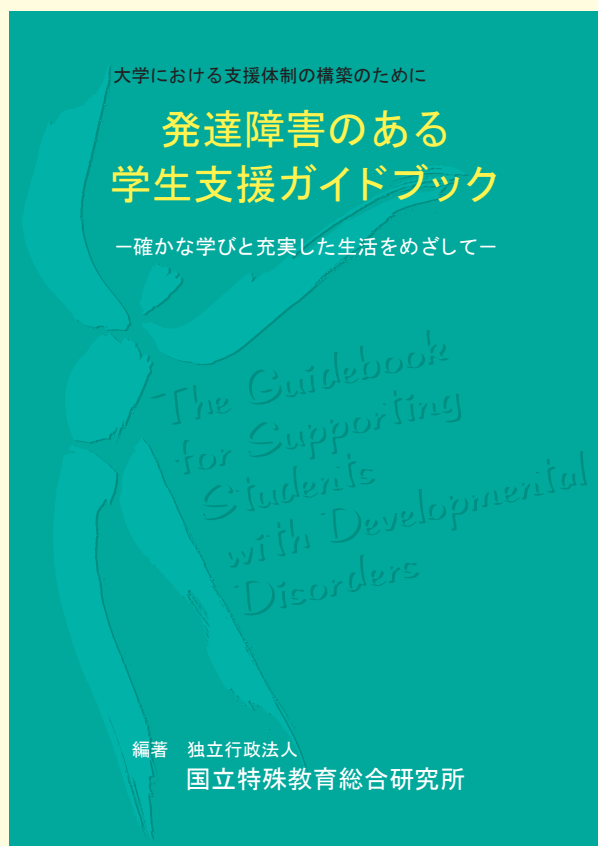
4. Publication of “Guidance Guide”

The NISE has also published a “Guidance Guide” concerning children with LD, ADHD and HFA (which are now included in “developmental disabilities”) in March 2005. It is easy for teachers to use, and covers such topics as the contents and methods of guidance for children with these disorders and matters to note. It consists of the sections “In Providing Guidance”, “Guidance Method and Theory – Specific Examples” and “Introduction to LD, ADHD and HFA”.

As specific examples, it treats problems such as “Have difficulty talking logically”, “Have difficulty understanding sentences related

with math” and “Tend to forget things”. For these items, the Guide provides explanation and solutions from such viewpoints as “Guidance and Care in Classrooms”, “Key Points in Understanding the Situation”, “Possible Causes of Problems”, “Meaning of Guidance” and “Guidance More Suited to Individuals”.

Thus, Japanese concerns are urgently tackling the task of correctly understanding developmental disabilities including LD, ADHD and HFA and of developing the systems to support children and students with such disabilities.



Guidebook to Support Students with Developmental Disabilities



A pamphlet