Promotion of Special Needs Education for Developing an Inclusive Education System

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1 Current Situation of Special Needs Education

Children with disabilities, need to be given appropriate education with special consideration for the degree of each condition of disability and their individual educational needs, so that they can maximize their possibility, become independent, and take part in society. Therefore, special textbooks for them, faculties with expert knowledge and experience, and wheelchair accessible structure are in use at schools for special needs education and classes for special needs education at primary and secondary schools (which are hereinafter referred to as public schools). Also, In addition to special support services in resource rooms, each person’s educational need is filled by disabled-friendly teaching methods such as achievement based teaching and teaching in small groups, and effective use of Special Needs Education Assistants in the public school classes.

As of May 1st 2014, approximately 406,000 students belong to schools for special needs education, classes for special needs education of public schools and special support services in resource rooms. Among them, the students at the stage of compulsory education were about 339,000, or 3.3% of all students at the same educational stage. The number of students taking classes at schools for special needs education, in the public school classes, or by special support services increases year after year. And, the rate of students who weren’t mentally challenged, but had a possibility of developmental disability is around 6.5% when the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) carried out research in 2012.

In recent years, the seriousness, overlap, and diversification of disabilities was increased. Demands for supporting students with developmental disabilities such as Learning Disabilities (LD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), high-functioning autism and requests for finding educational requirements from the early stage have been growing. In addition, the percentage of enrollment to high school level special needs education school increases, and students with disabilities have more chances after graduation. In consideration of all situations, the School Education Act was amended in June of 2006. And, previous school system for the blind, deaf and otherwise was converted into “special needs education school system” which can manage two or more types of disabilities in order to handle multiple disabilities. Schools for special needs education should give advice and support about the educational matters of students with disabilities by using their highly specialized knowledge and skills at the request of public schools, so that they play a role as a center system of special needs education (functioning as a resource center) in the community. Also in public schools, fostering of special needs education for students with disabilities including development disabilities is specifically set by law.

Along with the issue of Revised Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities in August of 2011, the law set out that necessary measures such as better education content, methods and so on must be taken with the best effort possible to enable students with disabilities and other students to study together as much as possible. The purpose is to give people with disabilities good education suitable for their ages, abilities, and characteristics of their disabilities.

2 Actions for Fostering Special Needs Education

(1) Looking at the Future Direction of Special Needs Education


1 Employees who assist school life and give learning support to children with disabilities in public schools.

2 Offering extra class in public school for children with mild disabilities (excluding intellectual disability) to reverse their disabilities.
The government was trying to conclude the convention as soon as possible and was discussing how to adjust Japanese laws and regulations. In the field of education, our task was adapting to an inclusive education system. Therefore, the Special Committee of the Future Direction of Special Needs Education set by the Central Education Council considered the way to develop special needs education in order to establish the system. As a result, “Promotion of Special Needs Education to Build an Inclusive Education System Directed at Forming a Cohesive Society” was released in July 2012. The report states: ① creating an inclusive education system in order to realize a cohesive society, ② advising families about entering school and selecting a school, ③ enhancing reasonable accommodation and an educational environment, ④ developing various places to study and partnerships between schools, ⑤ raising the expertise of teacher and staff.

Based on the report, in August 2013, the Order for Enforcement of the School Education Act was revised. One of the details of the revision was to change the past scheme where children and students with disabilities had to attend schools for special needs education into a new scheme where Boards of Education in municipalities determine what schools students should attend from a comprehensive viewpoint including the status of their disability.

(2) Improving Support System Provided by Community and School - Support for Children Include Developmental Disability-

① System Improvement to Develop Special Needs Education

Revision of School Education Act became effective after April 1st of 2007. On the same day, MEXT gave a notification called “Fosterage of Special Needs Education (announced by Director-General Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau)” to promote the efforts of Each School and the Board of Education. In addition to support system improvement, it also mentioned basic idea and points of attention about special needs education.

Our nation pays part of expense as Project for the Promotion of Special Needs Education System for every school (from kindergarten to high school, school for special needs education, and so on.)

In this project, cooperation with relevant organizations, visiting and advising school, helping by specialized team, building up and opening training courses and more are conducted.

We summarized the points to prevent and deal with abuse to persons with disabilities in July 2012, and reported how to teach children under medical treatment in March 2013. The information was made public to the relevant organizations. According to the research of improving status of special needs education in fiscal 2004, public schools almost perfectly arranges foundation such as establishment of “in-school committee” to set up support system and appointment of “Special Needs Education Coordinator.” And also, they steadily encourage making “individualized teaching plans” and “individualized education support plans.” Kindergartens and high schools are in progress, but are relatively behind compared to the schools.

② Allocation of Special Needs Education Assistant from Public Kindergartens to High Schools

In public schools, there are many different types of children with disabilities including developmental disability. With the above in mind, Japan has continued financial measures towards each municipality to let it allocate a “Special Needs Education Assistant” who assists school life and gives learning support to children with disabilities since 2007. The financial support expanded into kindergartens from 2009 and to high schools from 2011. We assist allocation of Special Needs Education Assistants by providing information like giving pamphlets which explain activity examples of the assistants to the Boards of Education.

The allocation number of Special Needs Education Assistants nationally increases. (Public kindergartens: around 5,600, public primary and secondary school: about 43,600, public high schools: around 480 assistants are allocated as of May 1st 2014.)

③ Adaptation to severity and overlap of disability

Recently, disabilities of children who attend schools for special needs education become more severe and overlapped. It is required for us to appropriately respond to the issue. Considering these situations, Law was changed in June 2006 so that the school system for the blind, deaf and otherwise changed into the system for school for special needs education. The course of study for school for special needs education posted in March 2009 was also improved.

④ “Medical Care” at School for Special Needs Education

There are pre-school children and pupils who need daily

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3 Committee for Special needs education led by a principal in order to establish support system through the entire school

4 Specialized teacher who helps school to cooperate with related organizations (educational or medical institution) and gives parents educational advices.
medical care at schools for special needs education, and they should be protected in order to have a safe school life. Therefore, MEXT and Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) have worked together and practically studied how to foster connections between schools for blind, deaf and otherwise (now called as special needs education school) and medical institutions since 1998.

On the other hand, the Certified Social Worker and Certified Careworker Act are partially revised because of “the Nursing Care Insurance Act for Strengthening the Basis of Nursing Service” (Act No.72 of 2011) which came into effect in June 2012. Due to this change, nursing care staff who took certain measure of training programs can also provide a medical care such as clearing phlegm blocked throats under certain conditions. Teachers in schools for special needs education used to provide medical care by ignoring the illegality. But, the new act makes them able to provide medical care institutionally.

In October 2011, MEXT began “the Medical Care Review Committee for Special Needs Education School” in order to consider whether schools for special needs education can provide safe and appropriate medical cares or not, and the committee put together its conclusion as a report in December. In response to it, MEXT notified the Boards of Education how to apply new act effectively to protect health and safety for children who need medical care.

School Enrollment Support

In order to support the students with disabilities, there is a system to encourage school enrollment on special needs education based on “the Act Related to Encouragement of School Enrollment for Special Needs Education School.” The system is used for guarantee educational opportunities to students with disabilities. Considering with special circumstances about attending school for special needs education and class for special needs education in public school, the nation and local authorities pay whole or part of expenses which is required to attend school according to their financial capacity. For example, expense for transportation, textbook, boarding house, and so on. The purpose is to reduce parents’ financial burden.

Improving Educational Curriculum for Special Needs Education

About educational curriculum for special needs education in schools for special needs education, primary and secondary schools, we investigated it based on a report from the Central Council for Education posted in January 2008. After that, the courses of study for primary and secondary school were published the same March, and the courses of study for high school and school for special needs education were issued following March.

The course of study for school for special needs education were updated from following points of view: ① updating its educational curriculum along with an improvement of educational curriculums for kindergarten, elementary, middle and high school, ② enhancement of teaching contents for each student to adapt severity, overlap and diversification of disability. ③ enhancement of carrier education to promote students’ independence and social participation.

Also, about special needs education in public schools, we specified that teachers provide students planned and organized teaching according to respective state of disability such as creating individualized teaching plans and individualized education support plans. Middle school and junior high school level special needs education school have fully carried out the new course of study since 2012.

① Adaptation for Severity, Overlap, and Diversification of Disability

In school for special needs education, in order to adapt for severity, overlap, and diversification of disability, we had regulated making individualized teaching plan, thinking out an educational curriculum for students with intellectual disability, and offering in-home or hospital visitation teaching to students who cannot go to school because of their disability. The new course of study for special needs education was issued in March 2009. It newly defines example methods such as cooperation between teachers and employment of outside experts. Also, the course of study states that faculty have to make individualized educational support plans in order to help students with related organization from the perspective of providing appropriate teaching for each students, as well as adding rule, “basics to interact with other people” as a content of “independent activity”.

② Carrier Education and Working Support Cooperating with Related Organization

It is very important for person with disability to be supported...
for employment and achieve vocational independence in order to be independent and take part in society throughout his or her life. Nevertheless, among graduates of schools for special needs education high school division, ratio of the people who enter welfare institutions are reached 64%. At the same time, ratio of people who get job are still 28% in 2014. Thus, vocational independent rate is in harsh conditions. Possible factors are improvement of organizing school for special needs education’s high school division, and the number of people who find employment is remaining flat although the number of students attended the high school division is increasing because of the growth of in-home or hospital visitation teaching caused by increasing severity and overlap of disabilities.

The new course of study describes several improvements due to enhancement of carrier education and working support; ① increasing opportunity for job experience such as long-term training at industrial fields, ②development of organizational framework at schools and cooperation with labour- and welfare-related institutions, ③ creating a new expert subject, ”Welfare” in school for special needs education’s high school division where students with intellectual disability go to. Now, MEXT studies development of carrier education in line with the purpose of the new course of study.

To foster employment of people with disabilities, a measure which unites institutions in the field of education, welfare, medical care and labour as one is required. For example, developing measures making smooth transition not only from welfare to employment, but also from school life to working life.

Therefore, MEXT cooperated with MHLW in March 2013 and issued a document to the Prefectural Boards of Education. The document fosters job support activities for children with disabilities by using various measures for labor organizations such as working support seminar and project fostering of people with disabilities’ job experiment.

(4) Improving Specialty of Teachers

The revised Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities issued in Aug 2011 states “Related to education for persons with disabilities, the nation and local authority (omitted) have to hire experts and enhance their qualifications, (omitted) foster development of the other environment.” Now, further improvement of teachers’ expertise is required. As of May 1st of 2014, among the teachers working at schools for special needs education, the ratio of teachers who have special needs education school teacher’s license is 72.7%, so that raising the percentage is an urgent issue.

Therefore, MEXT requests the Prefectural Boards of Education to set a goal and make a plan for increasing the percentage. At the same time, we ask them comprehensive decision with deep thought about status of teacher’s license holding ratio when they employ, train, and allocate teachers. Also, we have held leader training course which targets leaders of the Prefectural Boards of Education since 2006. Besides, NISE provides a variety of training programs in order to raise talented person to be a leader at each prefecture.

(5) Actions for eliminating discrimination against persons with disabilities

Based on the concept of the Treaty for the rights of people with disabilities, “Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities” was adopted in June of 2013. This act includes prohibition of discrimination on

Students with and without disabilities spending some time together as part of the school activities.
the basis of disabilities and that of not providing reasonable accommodation. After that, fundamental policy about eliminating discrimination against persons with disabilities was made as a government decision in February of 2015. In addition, MEXT established response guideline in areas of activities under its control, which includes concrete examples of injurious discrimination and reasonable accommodation in November of 2015.

(6) Actions for establishing a system for special needs services in resource rooms in high schools

In high schools, special composition of course of study like in classes for special education and special support services in resource rooms at primary and elementary schools is not allowed within the present system. Therefore, MEXT began a conference to consider such measures as establishing a system for special support services in resource rooms in high schools from October of 2015. The conference is going to present a report by the end of 2015 fiscal year.

(7) Efforts by National Institute of Special Needs Education (NISE)

NISE, as the only national institute for special needs education, fosters specialized study and training about how to teach preschool children, school children, and adolescent with various disabilities which include developmental disability. Moreover, it establishes “information center for developmental disability education,” and the center offers educational information related to developmental disability and shows lectures for teachers to educators and parents through the internet.

Current Status of Special Needs Education (as of May 1, 2014)

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<td>Speech impairment</td>
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Total number of children in compulsory education stage 10.19 million

- 0.67% (about 69,000) increased from 2004 (trend increasing)

- 1.84% (about 187,000) increased from 2004 (trend increasing)

- 3.33% (about 346,000) increased from 2004 (trend increasing)

Enrollment rate of about 8.5%

- *1 Children that could have development disorders (LD, ADHD, high-functioning autism, etc.)
- *2 This number is based on the judgment of many teachers including those responsible for classes in a survey carried out by MEXT in 2012, and is not based on the judgment of doctors.

Numbers as of May 1, 2014, apart from *2