

Students with Disability Taking Entrance Exam for Upper Secondary School

– The Case of Yutaro –

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I posted this documentary on Facebook, as I considered, even if it reveals only a portion of the reality of the situation, I could let people know how students with disability, especially with profound disability, try and make efforts to take the entrance exam to enter upper secondary school in Osaka. It is a documentary of Yutaro Arai who wanted to be enrolled in upper secondary school. I made some additions and corrections to the original Facebook post.

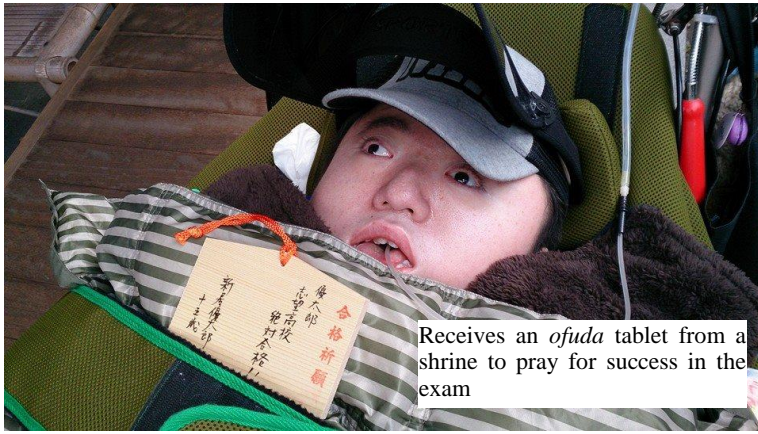
1. Decision to try to get enrolled in upper secondary school

On February 23rd, 2015, the first round of entrance exams were carried out for Osaka prefectural upper secondary schools. Again this year, more than a few students who have disabilities took on the challenge to take this exam. Among others, there were 17 young test-takers who live in Neyagawa or Hirakata City, Osaka, who were members of the “Kitakawachi Network to Send Students with Intellectual Disability to Regular Upper Secondary School.” I am one of the group’s members. They were taking the entrance exam not for trying to enter a school for special needs education but a regular upper secondary school, including, the social independence course (established at regular upper secondary schools) or the co-living promotion class (where students study at a regular upper secondary school, while they are officially enrolled in a upper secondary school for special needs education).

Among those 17 students, there was Yutaro. He is on a mechanical ventilator and needs support for 24 hours a day. With his hope to attend a local school after graduating from an elementary department of special needs school, he enrolled himself in a local public lower secondary school. During his three-year lower secondary school life, Yutaro has encountered a range of dramatic incidents involving friends, school teachers, the principal, the vice principal and other people around him and enjoyed every day at the school. Having known him, I noticed once again that the shorter the distance between Yutaro and other people around him is and the longer the relationship is, the deeper mutual understanding develops and much more changes occur in people.

As if it should be taken for granted, Yutaro wanted to attend a regular upper secondary school together with his lower secondary school classmates, not entering a school for special needs education. Fortunately, there is no school that does not accept qualified applicants to take entrance exam anymore. Meanwhile, however, schools welcome applicants and say, “We will accept you (but, only) if you pass the entrance exam.” Such a desire of students like Yutaro who want to attend a regular school has been presented to the Osaka Prefectural Board of Education and, for more than 20 years in the past, “accommodations for entrance exam” were discussed and reviewed prior to the exam. A range of accommodations have been made as necessary, including, allowing the applicant to take the exam in a separate room, enlarging the letters of exam question sheets, appointing someone to read the exam papers or write the answers on behalf of the applicant, not separating question sheets from answer sheets

and making the time for the exam longer.



In case of Yutaro, a request was made to allow him to take the exam in a similar manner to when he took the exam at lower secondary school, by assigning a person who reads questions for him and another person who reads his answers for him (Yutaro indicates “yes,” by blinking his eyelids) and allocating a nurse to stay for medical treatment. The Osaka

Prefectural Board of Education decided to allow to have a nurse who stands by in a separate room and only one helper to read questions for him (a teacher of his lower secondary school) for the reason to “maintain fairness among all applicants.” Which means, the helper who is allowed to be with Yutaro in the exam room has to do everything alone, reading questions for Yutaro, decoding his blinks and telling a person who writes Yutaro’s answers (a teacher of the upper secondary school) what Yutaro meant. Besides, the helper has to be there for Yutaro for three hours without break (even for five hours in total, from the morning to afternoon, for the second round of the entrance exam) and the helper would get extremely tense and feel responsible as he or she is required to be strictly accurate. A nurse’s attendance is required to support Yutaro not for his exam but for his living needs and the nurse would not be able to respond to an emergency in time if he or she stays in a distant room. Based on the above reasons, another request to reconsider requirements of Yutaro was submitted several times to the upper secondary school he was trying to enter as well as the Hirakata City Board of Education and the Osaka Prefectural Board of Education.

As the result, it was decided to set up a partition in a room where Yutaro would take the exam so that a nurse could stay on the other side. In this way, it is decided, the nurse can stay near Yutaro as if he or she is in a separate room. However, only one teacher was allowed to help Yutaro when he was taking the exam.

When the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified, making “reasonable accommodations” to eliminate social barriers became a requirement since “distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability” was defined as discrimination under the Convention. “Accommodations for entrance exam” on which we in Osaka have been working for many years can be deemed as “reasonable accommodations” required by the Convention. However, while considerations have been made for those who have physical/motor disability and visual or hearing impairment, it should be mentioned that no reasonable accommodations have been there for those with intellectual disability who “have difficulties to get sufficient marks in the exam.” In fact, a number of students who have intellectual disability and their parents are forced to choose school for special needs education or give up to even try to take the exam in the first place because they are unable to pass the entrance exam, despite wanting to go to a regular upper secondary school together with friends.

When I asked Yutaro after the entrance exam for upper secondary school, “How was the exam? Was it easy?” he blinked to us to show his confidence. To my next remark, “I hope you do your best in the second round of the exam, too,” he showed us strong blinks repeatedly. Yutaro was more than ready.

Tomorrow on March 2nd, the result of the “first round of entrance exam” will be announced. What will we see tomorrow?

2. Unfortunately, he did not pass! He is taking another challenge in the second round!!

On the day the result of the first-round exam was announced, I received a mail from Yutaro’s mother.

– The result of the first-round exam was announced today. Unfortunately, my son could not pass. There was a large crowd outside the gate even more than 30 minutes before the announcement time. Soon after it was announced, the crowd resolved. I met several people I know from the Kitakawachi Network and we talked and encouraged each other saying, “It did not go as we wanted. But we can do our best next time.” Yutaro took the entrance exam for the three subjects as other applicants with no disability did. The same day today, the result was announced for those who took the entrance exam for the social independence course which only required an interview.

When we were about to leave, someone called my son, “Yutaro!” It was a girl, a classmate of Yutaro at lower secondary school. She had passed the exam and when Yutaro said to her, “I did not pass. I have to try my best next time. Will you cheer for me?” To this, she answered, “Yes. Wish you do your best next time!” Although Yutaro told me he was “a little depressed” but he did not at all look different from usual Yutaro. So, I said to him, “After all you need to study more. But let’s do our best, Yutaro.” I am going to ask the teacher who helped Yutaro in the exam room how he did and submit our request again to the upper secondary school and both of the Boards of Education of Hirakata City and Osaka Prefecture, so that he can be given a better environment for the next exam based on his experience today and in the past. I would appreciate your support in this matter in the future, too. –

Among applicants who are members of the Kitakawachi Network, some successfully passed the entrance exam for private upper secondary school or special training school. One applicant passed the exam for a prefectural upper secondary school, specifically the “social independence course” of Hirakata Nagisa High School. The competition rate was as high as 4.33, because 13 students applied to fill the slots for only three. This is why, on one hand, there is a larger number of students who want to attend upper secondary school to which their friends from lower secondary school would go and, on the other hand, it is difficult to pass the exam as there are only a small number of seats, 33 seats in 11 upper secondary school (3 special seats per school) in Osaka Prefecture (including two Osaka municipal upper secondary schools). It can lead to a harsher competition for students with disabilities.

Although Yutaro said he was “a little depressed,” he is going to take the entrance exam that students without disability take in the second round, too. As mentioned already, we are going to submit a request again to allow him to have two helpers (teachers), one to read exam questions and another to interpret his answers. Now, not only Yutaro but many more students with disabilities are “studying” or “preparing for the next exam” to get ready for the second round.

The deadline to submit application for second-round entrance exam is Monday 9th and Tuesday 10th, the exam itself will be given on Monday 16th and the result will be announced on Monday 23rd.

3. Another challenge to pass in the second-round entrance exam

On March 16th, the second-round entrance exam for Osaka prefectural upper secondary schools was given. At various places around Osaka, a number of students with disabilities took this exam. Of course, Yutaro took on the second challenge following the first-round. This time, finally, he was allowed to have two teachers to help him, which was the result of his strong request for “accommodations for those who take entrance exam.” However, the two helpers will help Yutaro in turn, one for the first half and the other for the second half. As the result, Yutaro is to take the exam in a separate room from other students, where a nurse is waiting on the other side of the partition, and one helping teacher (lower secondary school teacher) is to read questions for Yutaro and signs Yutaro makes with his blinks to tell his answers to a upper secondary school teacher sitting next to him. When the three-hour first half ends, another helping teacher will come to take his turn. This is how Yutaro was to take the second-round entrance exam.

For the reason to “maintain fairness for other applicants,” why should they stick to this attitude and policy stubbornly? Even though rights of persons with disabilities are guaranteed under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, no reasonable accommodations are made for persons with intellectual disability who “have difficulties to record enough marks.” The result is to be announced on 23rd. Let’s look out for it!

4. Lower secondary school graduation ceremony

Yutaro’s mother posted on Facebook how the graduation ceremony was carried out at Yutaro’s lower secondary school. Let me introduce you to her post.

– Yesterday, the graduation ceremony was held at my son’s lower secondary school. Three years have passed since my son entered the lower secondary school after graduating from the elementary department of a special needs school. At the beginning, when my son started attending the lower secondary school on a stretcher with a mechanical ventilator, we heard a variety of criticisms including, “Such a student should not come here,” or “He should stay at the hospital.” At that time, my son was not accepted easily and had no friends at school.

Being unable to be understood by other people, we were frustrated at first but the distance became smaller and smaller as time passed and the number of people who helped my son at lower secondary school increased year after year.

My son cannot talk with his voice because he had the tracheotomy tube but can answer to any



question just with his blinks, which, however, resulted in poor communication with other classmates. My son wanted to have friends and communicate with them through emails, etc. So, he was wondering if he could give his mail address to other students at school because he knew he would miss them once he graduated. The daughter of M-san understood his wish and offered cooperation. She made a name card for my son drawing my son's portrait on it.



The graduation ceremony ended with excitement and a touching impression and my son handed over his name card to his classmates and close friends saying good-bye. Right when we got home, he found on his tablet several messages that had been already sent by two boys and two girls who were given his name card. How sweet they were! When we responded to those messages in a hurry, they immediately wrote back again and which made

us happy and very busy, which was a joy. I thought it would be wonderful if my son could continue to connect with them in the future, too. I feel happy that my son could attend a local lower secondary school. I really think so. –

5. Unable to pass in the second-round entrance exam. We will take another challenge!

On March 23rd, the result of the second-round entrance exam for Osaka prefectural upper secondary schools was announced.

As far as the members of the “Kitakawachi Network to Send Students with Intellectual Disability to Regular Upper Secondary School” are concerned, as of now, of three students who had failed to get in the social independence course in the first round of the exam, Student S passed the exam for a part-time upper secondary school, Student Y failed to enter high school for special needs education but decided to attend the upper secondary department of special needs school and Student I failed and could not enter a regular upper secondary school but decided to go to a special training school where the student had already been accepted. In April, a new upper secondary school life will begin. I hope they all make many friends and enjoy their youth to the fullest.

Unfortunately, Yutaro did not pass the exam this time again but he never gives up and is now trying to get enrolled in an upper secondary school that does not have enough students to fill the quota. Yutaro is going to take on the third challenge.

6. Hurrah! Yutaro passed!!

“Yutaro’s number is there. The number 5001 is there!”

Yutaro who previously failed the exam in both the first and second rounds for an Osaka prefectural upper secondary school succeeded to pass the exam in the secondary selection procedure to enter a part-time upper secondary school. The school was trying to take additional students to fill a predetermined quota. This entrance exam is to be given after the announcement of the result of the second-round exam, when the school could not have the target number of students after the exam in the

secondary selection procedure ends. The school Yutaro passed the exam for could not fill the shortage of students even after they tried to fill the quota.

Here is a Facebook post made by Yutaro's mother showing how he took and passed the exam in exciting words.

– (No. 1) *The day of entrance exam*

Today, we went to an upper secondary school to take the entrance exam in the secondary selection procedure.

This kind of recruitment of students is not well known. After the second round of entrance exam ends, if the school still has a shortage of students, it will recruit additional applicants. When an applicant submits an application for this scheme, the interview will be given right away. No paper exam is given and most applicants can pass as there is no exam. Such a shortage of students needs to be filled. In any case, the result will be announced two days later.

What kind of interview will that be? Almost no one knows. We asked the upper secondary school through my son's lower secondary school and learned that even if a parent(s) comes with the student (probably, a student without disabilities goes alone), the parent(s) has to wait in a separate room and the student alone will be given a ten-minute interview.

My son is in a wheelchair and he needs to have sputum suctioned on a regular basis. Can he be on his own? And he even cannot talk with voice. So, I talked with Yutaro in advance and based on his statement, I prepared some written material introducing himself, his life at lower secondary school and the reason why he wants to go to upper secondary school. I handed the material along with photos of my son's lower secondary school life to the interviewers and left the room. The interview ended in five minutes or so and I was really relieved.

Later he told me that the interviewers asked him if he wanted to attend an upper secondary school and they looked at the written material we prepared.

We are now feeling a little anxious until we hear the result and on the other hand, we are glad that the entrance exam finally ended. Of course, we will feel that everything really ends when the final result is announced.

Anyway, we are feeling relieved at least because the interview ended. –

*(Comment made by Matsumori): I can imagine how Yutaro was interviewed alone and gave a blink to the question of the interviewers, "Is your name Yutaro Arai?" and he would later answer with a stronger blink to another question, "Do you want to enter a upper secondary school?" I believe some kind of communication was born between Yutaro and upper secondary school teachers in the exam interview room.

– (No. 2) *Day of result announcement*

He passed! Finally. The third time did the trick! Finally it was determined. Thank you for your support, everyone.

Seeing the result, my son said he was "very happy and relieved." He looked fairly calm, though.

When savoring the lingering joy, we were called by teachers of the upper secondary school. They wanted to know about him, hearing what he has to say if he had time. Yes, of course. The teachers were trying to get ready to construct an environment to accept my son at school at this early stage, by listening to us. They wanted know what my son's disability was exactly called, how he studied at lower secondary school and what kind of tools and materials the upper secondary school should provide him. That day, we faced a barrage of questions.

*When the talk with teachers ended, it was time for Yutaro to be filmed for a movie as planned in advance. The movie team had been filming him for a while. The interview after the announcement of his passing the exam was also filmed and without us knowing, time had flown and it was already early in the evening for those who passed the exam to go back to school. *(Matsumori): Four of them including Yutaro who are users of artificial ventilators had been filmed as main characters in a movie entitled, "Kaze wa ikiyo to iu" (The wind tells us to live). The movie now is completed and will be premiered soon.*

At the upper secondary school, we were given lengthy explanations and had to fill in lots of documents, which took two hours. It was really long! When we were about to leave, the principal came to see us to offer greetings. He said, "Congratulations. There might be shortcomings in our preparation to accept you here but we will learn from lessons to improve." We were happy to find that the school seemed to have many considerate teachers.

Of course, we may encounter not a few problems at school. We hope, however, people will know about who my son is little by little and my son will be able to adapt to a new environment and enjoy upper secondary school life.

We could come to this point only because we could have your support everyone. You were concerned and offered cooperation to my son. Please support us in the future, too. To tell you the truth, I am finally relieved now. I am so happy. We found the number! There was my son's No. 5001 among those who passed!! –



Announcement of the exam result. We found our number, 50001!

*(Matsumori): I can see how the greetings and approach made by the upper secondary school teachers right after the announcement encouraged his father and mother, and particularly Yutaro. I think they now have a sense of fulfillment that Yutaro was able to enter a good upper secondary school. With excitement I am looking forward to seeing what kind of upper secondary school life Yutaro will have from now.