

Status and Issues for Students with Intellectually Disability in Regular Public Upper Secondary Schools in Kyoto Prefecture

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I am a mother of a boy who is repeating his first year of upper secondary school education for the third time in a regular public school. With the enactment of the "Act for Eliminating Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities" by the national government in 2016 and the Kyoto Prefectural Ordinance



Dance at kindergarten (on the extreme right)

"Creating a society in which individuals with and without disabilities can live with ease safely and lively" in 2015, I thought that my son would be able to attend upper secondary school together with all the other children. In reality, however, my son is having a hard time not being able to advance up to the next grade.

My son was born one of a boy-girl set of twins. He was born with Down syndrome and hard of hearing. After receiving heart surgery, he had a tracheostomy from 20 months to 3 years old. He attended kindergarten with his sister at a school that understood his disabilities. His friendly character was fostered during this period.

At Elementary and Lower Secondary School

He was enrolled in a regular class at a public elementary school. The assistant teacher did not dedicate her full time to Kota, but behaved like a teacher to all the students in his class. The assistant teacher stayed with the class all day when he was in the first and second grades, and only for PE classes after that. The class teacher instructed the assistant teacher and other students to "Let him do what he can by



Dance at sport festival in his first grade (on the middle)

himself. Help him only when he's in trouble. But don't help him too much." Because of their difference in physical size, some children were cautious about helping him; but there were children who would fight with him without reserve. Children's involvement with Kota had been perfect, just enough not too much and not too little. He played soccer in the local boy's group, and he still goes for swimming lessons he started at this time. Through these experiences, he made friends with other children and adults in the community who understood his condition, as he learned social rules and accumulated experience.



Table tennis club at his third grad of lower secondary school (on near side)

He also studied in regular class in upper secondary school. The principal looked for the good points of the students and praised them. Students who saw my son for the first time learned from the involvement with students who came from the same elementary school. For the school excursion, my son went on a trip to Okinawa, during which Kota together with his classmates

stayed at private homes on their own without support assistants. Before Kota enrolled in the lower secondary school, the school was having problems with badly behaved students, but by graduation, the lower secondary school became a school with students that were kind to one another.

Entrance examination for upper secondary school

He failed the entrance exam to the vocational course of an upper secondary department of school for special needs education. The majority of individuals with disabilities select a local school for SNE to receive upper secondary education. However, after only half a day in the upper secondary department of school for SNE, he said, "It's boring," and refused to go. So he took the entrance examination, once during the first term and once during the second term, to a regular upper secondary school located quite a distance away from home that still had openings, and was accepted on the second try. He started his upper secondary school life commuting to his school by bus and train that took 2 hours one way.

School life in upper secondary school and issues of promotion to the next grade

This upper secondary school had never accepted students with severe disabilities like my son. A support assistant stays with him throughout the day, which hindered him from being directly involved with fellow students. I had discussed with the school side on many occasions about the duties of the support assistant, but it was difficult to get them to understand. Teachers were at a lost for how to deal with him. Some teachers praise my son for commuting from so far away. Some positively assessed him for being able to do more than before. And there were other teachers who were perplexed at not being able to communicate with him, and thought it was not safe for him to be studying alongside other students. "This is not a school that provides compulsory education. It's an upper secondary school. There are schools available to students with special needs. If you chose our school, you need to fit our criteria." This seems to be the opinion of the majority of teachers.

Since my son enrolled in the school, I have been saying to the school that "Even though my son has disabilities, I want him to study together with other students to acquire social skills. I want him to learn more. Please allow him to move up to the next grade. There are things that he cannot do even if he tries. It is particularly difficult for him to mark passing scores on tests. But he can diligently work on problems, so could you please consider a different form of evaluation for him." But after 3 years, we see no path that we can follow. On the other hand, he is now able to commute to school on his own using multiple public transportation systems that take 2 hours one way. He made acquaintances and enjoys the morning hours.



Play at Cultural Festival at first grade in upper secondary school. He could not say his words well but received big applause as his facial expression was great.

For future

"Creating a society in which all individuals, with or without disabilities, are respected as irreplaceable individuals and equally enjoy basic human rights is the thinking common to not only our country but to the entire human race. ...It is necessary to eliminate behavior that discriminates against individuals because of disabilities or infringes on other rights and interests, as well as to remove social barriers, fully deepen the understanding of disabilities by and for all Kyoto residents, and to promote

measures to support social participation by individuals with disabilities." This wording in the Ordinance sounds so empty. There is no other reason than inability to receive passing scores on tests that hinders him from moving up to the next grade level. The only reason he cannot score on tests is because of his disabilities.

Recently there was an incident that made me re-acknowledge the meaning of learning together. One parent of a child with disabilities named children who provided suitable help at school to their child. I was surprised that these were children who were involved in one way another with my son during kindergarten, elementary school and/or lower secondary school. Children who grew up with children with disabilities during childhood or their school years are able to be amicably involved with individuals with disabilities. We will all come to old age and will start feeling physical limitations. Disability becomes our problem not someone else's problem. I would like for as many people as possible to know that "To realize inclusive society, understand individuals with disabilities, and for individuals with disabilities to acquire the skills to lead a social life, it is important for education not to segregate but to enable learning and growing together."