

Reform of the Educational Finance System as the Foundation of Compulsory Education*

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The conditions required for a reform of the educational finance system as the foundation of compulsory education are 1) devolution to schools and introduction of national standards in order to deal with “individual equality” while compensating for the insufficiency of “aspectual equality,” and 2) dealing with educational needs not guaranteed within the framework of the public schools. As well, within the context of funding cuts focused on efficiency, the implementation of accountability for schools and educational finance is essential for plentiful compulsory education finance.

Keywords: education finance; compulsory education; devolution to schools; equality

1. Introduction

Generally speaking, current education finance is in a state of “public and private fluidity in education costs” (Suetomi 2010, p. 125). In this context, a discussion of the expansion of the roles demanded of compulsory education and, in response, the rules concerning the input of public educational funding is one of the most important tasks among all those facing the educational finance system. The intent of this paper is to grasp the current tasks regarding the compulsory education finance system and to discuss in concrete terms the direction of reforms which may be taken up in Japan’s future.

Compulsory education as discussed here refers not only to the formal meaning of the educational curriculum studied in public elementary and junior high schools, but the broader sense of the provision of places and services for the growth forming the basic capabilities of children at the age of compulsory education.

There are two reasons why it is necessary to approach compulsory education in the

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broader sense. 1) The function of compulsory education as the “universal guarantee of common education” which forms the common base of society is being reevaluated (Omomo 2005 p. 451, Kariya 2009 p. 276), and greater interest is being taken in the reconstruction of the compulsory education guarantee system through the public schools. 2) At the same time, the guarantee of education is becoming respected from the perspective of attention paid to children’s individual characteristics and socioeconomic context. In short, there is also increasing importance being placed on the awareness that “it is urgent to discuss to what extent diverse and individual demands can be absorbed into the framework of the public education system” (Miyadera 2011, p. 8). For this reason, the situation calls for a discussion of the structure of a flexible and diverse compulsory education guarantee which goes beyond the current public schools.

As well, politically, interest in improving children’s academic abilities through PISA and national achievement and ability surveys is rising, academic ability is becoming an important issue in educational budgeting both nationally and regionally, and it is becoming easier to connect this with compulsory education guarantees through the public school system. Based on this situation, presenting policy alternatives for the compulsory education guarantee is also one of the roles demanded of educational finance research.

This paper will, given this situation, use its Section 2 to organize the systemic issues facing the status of the compulsory education finance. In Section 3, then, it will discuss the expansive standardization of school functions in order to guarantee that compulsory education functions as “the universal guarantee of common education,” the systemic organization needed to accomplish this, and also the methods of resource distribution for systems which guarantee compulsory education outside the public school system.

2. Systemic Issues in Compulsory Education Finance

There are two major systemic issues facing compulsory education finance.

- 1) The issue of the failure to establish a financial basis for public schools, the practical organs of compulsory education.
- 2) When discussing the guarantee of compulsory education not limited to the public schools, it is also important to observe that the structure of the new resource distribution methods and rules accompanying the expansion of the coverage of education is insufficient (Ogawa 2010a, pp. 9–19).

Through discussing these two systemic issues, this paper will clarify the specific discussion points involved in addressing the “universal guarantee of common education” and diversifying educational needs through the compulsory education finance system.

2.1. The failure to establish school decentralization

In the old compulsory educational finance system, the distribution of the burden of and authority over finance between the nation and the local governments had become a central issue. For this reason (Aoki 2004, Ogawa 1991), in the situation the establishment of finance resources and authority for schools (school decentralization) remains insufficient.

In Japan’s educational finance system, with regard to teacher placement and class sizing, systemic organization has been carried out with a focus on the correction of regional discrep-

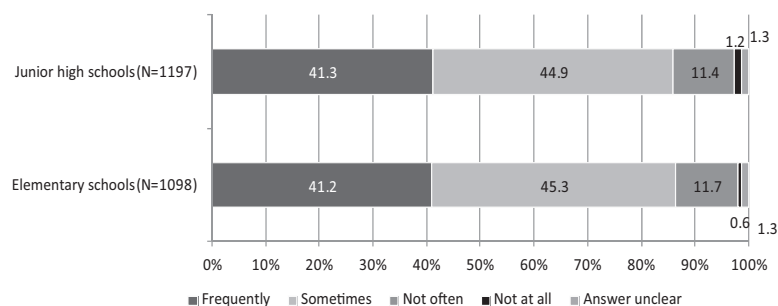


Figure 1 Principals' awareness regarding insufficiency of school budgets (Benesse 2008, p. 43), chart by the author

ancies (Kariya 2009, pp. 139–144). As a result, the management authority of the nation and the prefectures, which hold personnel authority, is considerable, and the educational finance basis and positioning of schools as local agencies of municipalities is weak. For this reason, the establishment of finance and authority for public schools, the agencies of compulsory education, is weak, and the issue of “school decentralization” is that response to the needs of regions and schools is not always appropriately carried out (Suetomi 2008). Figure 1 shows principals' awareness of the sufficiency of school budgets (Benesse 2008, p. 43), and Figures 2 and 3 the relations between the degree of insufficiency in school budgets and the average school budgets (per student) (All-Japan Public Elementary and Junior High Schools Business Managers Research Association 2008, p. 42).

Figure 1 makes it clear that over 90% of elementary and junior high school principals feel that school budgets are insufficient, and Figures 2 and 3 that there is a gap of over ¥20,000 per student in both elementary and junior high schools between schools which replied that they “have never felt insufficiency” in their distributed school budget and those which replied “other (paying with PTA budget, etc.),” which are thought to be those suffering from the most severe shortfalls.

These responses are limited to the operating costs needed for school management, but if expanded to teaching staff and support staff, it would become clearer that even more resources are insufficient on the ground at schools, and that the management resources which are a necessary precondition for sufficient provision of compulsory education services and effective management in Japan's public schools are not being guaranteed.

The positioning of the failure to establish school decentralization as a central issue of compulsory education finance is due to the fact that public schools are the practical organs of compulsory education. The general merits of school decentralization are summed up straightforwardly in the topic of New Public Management (NPM) as, with regard to personal public services in welfare, education, etc., if there is not “a certain degree of room for free judgment [on the ground near the recipient of services], the policy will not be effectively carried out” (Honda 2009, p. 30).

To put it the other way around, many of the public elementary and junior high schools responsible for Japan's compulsory education still have severely limited authority with regard to budget and resource distribution. Schools in Japan, struggling with insufficient budgets and authority, work to put into practice the national curriculum, with its focus on academic ability, and to “create individually distinct schools,” as well as dealing with households and students

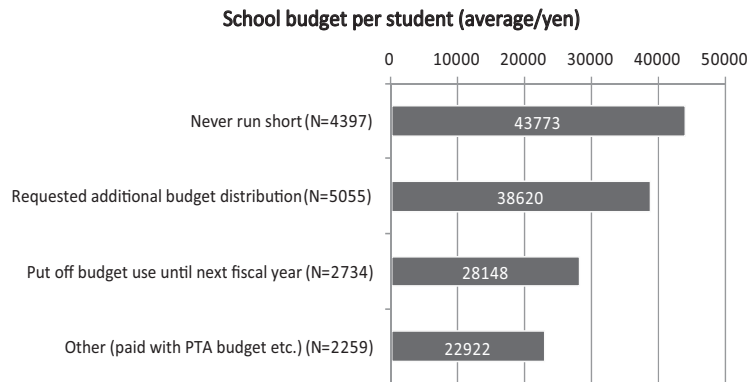


Figure 2 School budget insufficiency and school budget distribution (elementary schools)

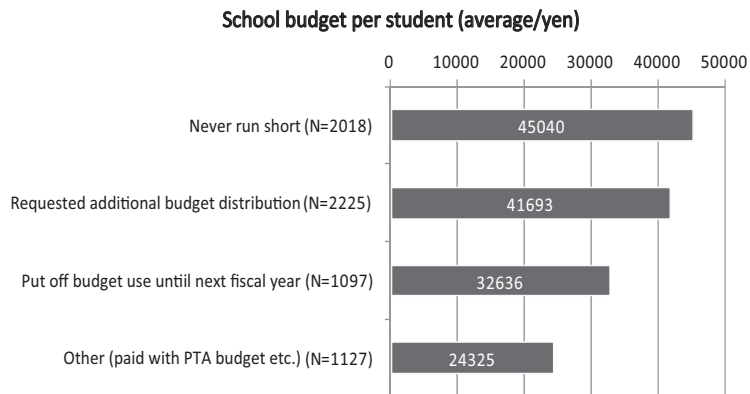


Figure 3 School budget insufficiency and school budget distribution (junior high schools) (Chart made by the author from All-Japan Public Elementary and Junior High Schools Business Managers Research Association 2008, p. 42)

burdened with various issues.

The Central Council for Education, in its “Basic Attitudes toward the Formulation of the Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education” (9 December 2011), demands mainly “the improvement of educational content and methods, the educational environment, and the educational system, and the establishment of a PDCA cycle for improvement through objective inspections” for the improvement of basic academic ability (p. 16). However, even if public schools’ PDCA cycles are reinforced, it is foreseen that, with no authority over budget or staff placement, evaluation costs alone will increase, or that the effects will be extremely limited.

On the financial side, the merits of promoting school decentralization are somewhat different for each country, but those common to each country include the three points of bringing transparency to compulsory education costs, clarifying the rules of finance distribution, and serving as a precondition for improved school-by-school performance (Suetomi 2008, Odden 1999).

That is to say, when national or regional governments set out to make budgetary distributions to schools based on some uniform condition, there is first a need to calculate the affected scope of compulsory education and the costs necessary therefor, through which the costs of

compulsory education will be made transparent to members of society. At the same time, setting up tilted distribution among schools with differing conditions requires the creation and clarification of agreement upon distribution rules and bases. In addition, giving the position of budget distribution unit to schools will end up strengthening the PDCA cycle with schools as units, and will thus strengthen the systemic conditions for performance improvements school by school.

However, the policy context of school decentralization varies by country. This diversity includes England, where school decentralization and the merit system are closely connected, has NPM-style school decentralization reform; the United States, which aims for equality and adequacy regarding educational costs and academic ability gaps between school districts and in that context focuses on the principle of guaranteed school finance; Sweden, which has advanced school decentralization in the context of finance efficiency and diversification of regional educational needs; and so on (Suetomi 2008, 2011, Yoneoka 2011). School decentralization is one policy method of educational finance, and there is a need for consideration of what policy principles it leads to. This will be discussed in Section 3.

In Japan, there are only a few local governments which practice school decentralization with regard to compulsory education finance. The main reasons for this are 1) the financial role of local authorities, which establish public elementary and junior high schools, is limited to the costs for school maintenance operation; and 2) because the prefectures hold the reins regarding personnel for public elementary and junior high schools, it is difficult for municipal boards of education to serve as the main governance bodies for schools.

Local governments promoting school decentralization can be roughly divided into 1) large areas such as ordinance-designated cities where, because a small number of school board employees need to manage a large number of public elementary and junior high schools, they have taken up a sum discretionary budgeting system in which nearly all of the budget needed for school management is transferred to schools, and 2) cases where coordination between school boards and schools is established in order to gain budget from local councils and strengthen school management functions.

According to Ogawa (2010b, pp. 218–219), while assembling diverse attitudes and demands regarding schools and education in the community, when deciding what kind of policy to put first to answer to community-building and residents/parents' needs, a promising option for the enhancement of compulsory education is to guarantee finance to local authorities through education-specific funding.

At the same time, it is important that local governments clarify the scope and costs of the compulsory education they are trying to carry out at the schools they manage, and that there is clear presentation with which residents as well can agree of the basic rules by which distribution is carried out, as well as increased school decentralization in order that public schools, which are the practical organs of compulsory education, can provide appropriate and rapid educational services.

2.2. Lack of expanded scope and distribution rules for public education

The guarantee of compulsory education finance for schools and municipalities is important, but it is important, when considering how finance is guaranteed, that there be discussion regarding the scope of the “universal common education” which should be guaranteed by local governments and public schools.

Here I will organize diversifying public education needs, with regard to their connection with finance guarantees, into the following three points: 1) expansion of the national minimum and “aspectual inequality,” 2) welfare-type support for students and families, and 3) guarantee of public funding for “fee-paying educational opportunities.”

(1) Expansion of the national minimum and “aspectual inequality”

A characteristic which illuminates the expansion of the target area of public schooling is that, first, the national minimum demanded of public schools is itself expanding.

From the late 1990s on, within a fifteen-year or more educational reform, various educational activities have been introduced, including the addition of General Studies time, attitudes toward career education and special needs education, the 10% increase in class time (for Japanese, social studies, math, science, foreign language, and physical education) called for by the shift in the official Courses of Study, foreign language activities in elementary schools, and so on. As well, roles which public schools can no longer avoid have come to include maintaining the safety of school buildings and school zones, psychological care for children, individual attention to parents and so on; this too can be seen as an expansion of the national minimum.

Elsewhere, the financial base which supports this has, in many cases, been ignored for short-term funding aid, perhaps under the discretion of regional governments. For example, the insufficient staffing of holders of special education teaching licences is frequently pointed out, as is that of student support staff in special needs education (Yamamoto 2008, pp. 437–439). As well as promoting increased staffing and research, the national government took regional financial measures for special education support staff of roughly ¥38.7 billion in 2009, ¥43.5 billion in 2010, and ¥48.8 billion in 2011, but the discrepancies between prefectures are significant.¹¹

According to Kariya (2009), the education finance system in postwar Japan found its educational equality in “aspectual equality,” trying to remedy the gaps in educational conditions between regions, especially by staffing. However, under the current education finance system which is shrinking the control functions of the regions, “aspectual equality” is far to seek for inclusive educational conditions for children with developmental difficulties.

Regarding the regular budget for educational materials approved as a part of regional funding measures, it has already been pointed out that funding situations differ sharply between prefectures.² The gap in the funding of basic costs which support schools’ teaching activities is also an issue. I want to confirm, through a variety of metrics, the gaps between prefectures regarding the material and human conditions needed for support of the simultaneously increasing national minimum.

Fig. 4 shows the number of support staff assigned to special needs education (2008), the percentage of school counselors assigned to public junior high schools (2010, 4 hours or more per week), and the earthquake-proofing of public elementary and junior high schools, by prefecture.³

The number of students assigned to one special needs education support staff member, shown in the bar graph, implies “more attention for fewer students,” but while prefectures such as Mie and Kanagawa have fewer than 20 students per support staff member (in simpler terms, 2 staff members for a 40-student class), in Aichi and Kagoshima one staff member is responsible for more than 40 students. That is, a gap of more than double the number of students supervised exists between different prefectures. As well, the percentage of schools where a

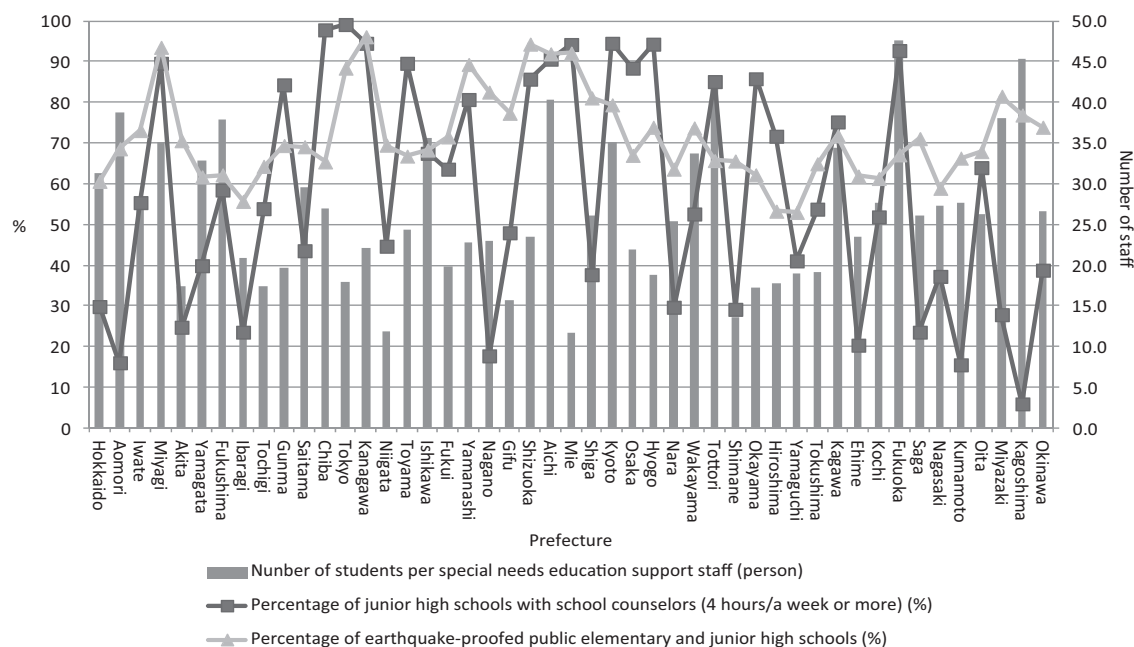


Figure 4 Physical and personnel discrepancies between prefectures

school counselor is assigned for four hours or more a week is under 20% in Nagano, Aomori, Kumamoto, and Kagoshima among others, while in urban prefectures like Tokyo, Kyoto, and Fukuoka, it is sometimes over 90%; financial solidity can be said to be connected to the system of mental counseling for students. While the earthquake-proofing of public elementary and junior high schools is over 50% overall, it is under 60% in Ibaragi, Hiroshima, and Yamaguchi among others, confirming a gap between regions in approaches to ensuring the safety of public schools as a gathering place for students as well.

In addition to these, there are major differences by region in the progress of systems to guarantee compulsory education to resident foreign students. The status quo is that, as shown in section 2, the budget apportioned to each school, in order to achieve the national minimum, shows huge differences.

The expansion of the scope of public education is coming up as the expansion of the national minimum which should be guaranteed to students in public schools, but the education finance guarantee supporting that is still not viewed as important. This has led to the current situation of major “aspectual inequality” between prefectures. In areas apart from the assigned number of teachers, one of the most serious issues of Japan’s compulsory education finance system is the question of how to remedy the gap in educational conditions between regions.

(2) Welfare support for students and households

The point that the system of welfare support for households, a precondition for the favorable functioning of public education, is insufficiently organized is also a major issue for the compulsory education finance system.

Teachers can deal with trouble originating in the school education system, such as complaints from parents. However, schools alone cannot handle welfare support for households

faced with difficult educational conditions such as low income and single parenting.

Japan's school management and school culture are highly closed in nature, and regarding individual support for households in coordination with municipal social workers, because there may not be anyone responsible for coordination with child welfare and so on, most schools are only managing a very limited role in handling child abuse and similar issues.

In a situation summed up as "when students and the families in their background have trouble, we must take a negative view of schools' success in effectively carrying out the role of dealing with welfare" (Honda 2011, p. 116), expectations are being placed on school social workers. However, as the national funding for school social workers has been lowered since 2009 to cover only a third of the total funding, this placement is not making progress.

Children struggling with difficult educational conditions due to the stringent labor market, the fluidization of marital relationships and so on are becoming the target of public education. As these children increase in numbers, in many cases the guarantee of attending school which is the precondition of compulsory education is made difficult by child abuse, truancy, acting out, suicide, and so on.⁴

Education is not a one-way service from teacher to pupil, but a collaborative, productive service which improves its functionality through the mutual interaction between teacher and student (Ichikawa 2006 p. 79, Oshio 2012 p. 122). When we think of the collaborative-productive character originally attaining to education, the work of more deeply supporting the educational conditions of students, both the receivers and the creators of education, is inseparable from public education.

That is, compulsory education has plunged into the stage at which it must also take on the guarantee of children's growth environments, and at which the judgment must be made of whether or not to include in the scope of the guarantee by the educational finance system, as a national standard, specialists in that area similarly to teaching staff.

(3) The guarantee of public funds for "fee-paying educational opportunities"

Accompanying the expanded scope of public education, at the cutting edge are policies through which cram schools and private lessons et cetera become the object of compensation in kind through public funding support, providing households with cash for attending cram schools or making them the object of voucher use.

This kind of guarantee of public funds for "fee-paying educational opportunities" (Mikami 2005, p. 108) is being practiced not only in large urban areas such as Tokyo and Osaka Prefectures, but also in non-urban regions such as Akita and Fukushima. As well, among school-regional cooperation enterprises like school support regional headquarters and after-school programs for children, schools for which study help, sports, and/or cultural activities are provided are increasing nationwide.

When considering whether it is appropriate to grant public funding for this kind of "fee-paying opportunity," it is necessary to attend to policy ideas common to both urban and non-urban areas. One point held in common is the awareness of the need to "remedy the study gap" (Sakuma 2009). This is an attempt to remedy through public funding the gap between educational opportunities caused by household income in large cities and geographical issues like areas in non-urban regions without cram schools, in order to improve the academic abilities needed for further education. For example, Tokyo has adopted a system which effectively covers the cram school costs of low-income households, while in Akita Prefecture's Higashi-

Naruse Village the board of education manages a cram school supported by public funds.

However, the scope of services which become the object of public fund injections and the form of the services provided vary by municipality and school. It is also necessary to make decisions in a search for the local optimum, including municipal geographic conditions and local residents' attitudes towards education etc. But it is also certain that gaps between schools and regions are arising according to varying attitudes toward "remedying the study gap."

"Between municipalities which actively approach educational reform and take on the financial costs thereof and those that don't or can't, an increased gap is created. Children not only don't choose the region into which they are born, they are hardly involved at all in the decisions thereafter" (Omomo 2005, p. 448). Care should be taken to avoid allowing this situation to expand into the area of extrascholastic education.

From a realistic perspective, the "universal guarantee of common education" in modern Japan is not guaranteed only by the schools. With the preconditions of experiences and time in addition to school such as life experiences at home, additional study time at cram schools and so on, the system of child-raising takes shape, and in modern Japan most of these things can be bought with money. As well, the purchase of "fee-paying educational opportunities" in the form of alternative schools for children who cannot adapt to public schools is of great value.

Envisaging not only the realization of the duty to attend school in public elementary and junior high schools but also the inclusion of free (alternative) schools and extrascholastic education, policies conclude that a realistic method of "remedying the study gap" is impossible: this is the current state of affairs in Japan's gap countermeasures. It is highly likely that this tendency will continue to expand in the future. Regarding the currently irregularly conducted funding for extrascholastic learning opportunities and free schools, one judges that it has reached the stage of concrete discussion regarding its positioning within the education finance system.

3. The Reorganization and Policy Principles of the Compulsory Education Finance System

The system reform of educational finance was stated in Section 2 to be called for in order to establish a financial guarantee for public education and funding for the expanding target areas of public education.

However, depending on with what kind of political principles the system reform of educational finance is carried out, it goes without saying that compulsory education will present different aspects.

Among the principles which can become the organizing fundamentals of educational finance, powerful ones are egalitarianism, efficiency strategy, and communitarianism.

Here, I will organize how each of these perspectives could function with regard to the reorganization of compulsory education finance, and what kind of systemic tasks they would involve.

3.1. Egalitarianism

Interest in an egalitarian system of resource distribution, symbolized by "equal educational opportunity," has been growing in recent years. The background to this can be said to

involve mainly the increased societal unease over opportunity gaps and ability gaps caused by household income, and the strengthening point of view that a “guarantee of universal common education” is beneficial to the maintenance and integration of a democratic society (Omomo 2011, Miyadera 2011).

Given these expectations, the most accurate image is probably that the modern conditions for realizing an egalitarian distribution of resources through compulsory education funding are “a guarantee of opportunities which is not a flat equalization of educational opportunities, but one based on actual, individual needs” (Miyadera 2011, p. 8). In simpler terms, pursuing the “equality of the individual” is the egalitarian aspect sought in the current compulsory education finance [system].

Simply put, the method is to distribute resources in greater quantity to children in difficult conditions (low income, disabilities, ethnic minorities etc.) and to schools which, having many of these children as students, work under difficult educational conditions.

In the United Kingdom and Sweden, nearly all the money budgeted for schools is distributed by a voucher system according to a calculation formula which considers students’ socio-economic backgrounds. This voucher system, of course, exists on the basis that teacher hiring is done by individual schools, and that schools with more resources can acquire more gifted teachers.

On the other hand, because in Japan prefectures have the right of hiring teachers for compulsory education, they have dealt with these problems with the method of “additional placement” and personnel changes, increasing teaching staff at schools where students frequently act out or show low academic skills, as well as deploying teachers skilled in controlling and disciplining students.

However, methods like “additional placement” and personnel changes have the disadvantage of not being able to increase staffing sufficiently, when we compare, for example, local governments enthusiastic about compulsory education which use individual municipal resources to hire teachers and support staff with those which have funding troubles or haven’t been able to build good relationships with the prefecture.

As a scholar of education finance, I want to draw the sharpest attention to the point that, regarding the reorganization vision for the compulsory education finance system, there is not necessarily an affinity for Japan in pursuing “individual equality” in compulsory education or in using the voucher method for school budgets.

As shown in Section 2, we have not even arrived at sufficient “aspectual equality” between regions, and as the national minimum is expanded, a situation in which it is hard to say that school-level budgets are sufficiently guaranteed exists as a precondition to the reform of the compulsory education finance system.

Even if the current compulsory education budget of the national and regional governments combined were to be changed to a school voucher budget by per-head distribution, according to students’ socioeconomic conditions and numbers, under the principle of “individual equality,” it would not constitute a solution for the insufficiency of public school budgets and resources. As well, there has been little progress in the formation of discussion and social agreement on technical preconditions to vouchers such as calculating the public school management costs and deciding what students’ socioeconomic conditions are so as to calculate them into the budget.

For Japan’s compulsory education finance, addressing “individual equality” while compensating for “aspectual equality” is a realistic solution. This requires the calculation of the school

management costs necessary for the expansion of the national minimum in public schools. As well, regarding staffing, through introducing a national staffing standard in the same way as the technology of the compulsory education funding government contribution system, “individual equality” could also be dealt with to some degree. Specifically, through establishing a staffing standard that would deal with the educational needs of low-income families, special needs education, and resident foreigners etc., it is expected that fine-grained handling of individual educational needs would progress.⁵ As stated in Section 2, regarding the guarantee of staff to deal with the individual needs of children and/or household welfare support who had not been previously included in formal staffing standards, such as teachers of Japanese as a foreign language, special needs education support staff, and school social workers, this could have great significance.

However, depending on the scope of equality guaranteed and the evaluation standards of “equality of what,” affinity with neoliberal educational reforms and efficiency-strategy merit-based thinking will increase, and concerns will also increase that resource distribution will fail to go beyond the scope necessary to raise test scores.

For example, regarding alternative schools for children who can’t adapt to public schools, the author has held that these students’ withdrawal from public schools should be approved and that they should be given vouchers for the equivalent amount of resource money (Suetomi 2010, p. 206), but if the right of choice by parents is approved on a broad scale, it could mean the return of the neoliberal reforms. Or, through a reinforced idea that guarantees of educational success should be limited to academic ability, Japanese society could return to the education based on overheated merit-based thinking to which it once fell prey.

What is important is that the process of reorganizing the compulsory education finance system be put into practice, in order to guarantee educational opportunities through formulas for distribution of increased budget and staff, after specific discussion of what the children should be. This kind of discussion should be carried out not at the local/regional level but at the national.

3.2. Efficiency strategy

It is efficiency strategy which is regulating the distribution of compulsory education finance from the realistic perspective. Bluntly, this is the attitude that “if education is to be funded from taxing the nation’s citizens, then the most effective possible method of use is desirable” (Oshio 2012, p. 118). More effective usage, in modern Japan, overwhelmingly means a policy stance stating that funding should go into elements where a measurable economic impact regarding “academic ability” can be confirmed (Kanda 2011).

The ranking of students’ academic ability on a national or international level, through PISA, TIMSS, or national academic/achievement tests, is growing clearer. Accompanying this, great influence is held in other countries as well by those who argue against the input-based ideas which put importance on the injection of finance itself, and for educational funding for elements which show results in academic performance and system construction which raises school accountability for academic results (Hanushek 2003, Wobmann 2003).

It goes without saying that there is great affinity between the basic stance of public education finance of “complying with a general reform of spending and income, while providing the truly necessary funding”⁶ under limiting financial conditions and this kind of efficiency-strategy view focused on results.

However, the efficiency-strategy and results-focused view is also backed up by the status quo, in which there is currently no measure of results for public schools except academic ability. Among MEXT's surveys into truancy and problem behavior, in particular, Kanda points out that "a judgment can be made regarding 'bullying' that the verified analysis is not necessarily appropriate, given whether or not the number of reports accurately reflect the actuality and how difficult analysis itself is" (Kanda 2011, p. 71); the Japanese educational system is faced with its failure to provide a usable metric for quantitative measuring of the effects of public schools. As Kanda, responsible in his capacity as MEXT's finance and budget officer, adds, "it has never been a simple problem to define 'the results of education'" (Kanda 2011, p. 72). However, the responsibility of Japan's educational administration, which is not managing to provide numerical data that stands up to countrywide analysis as with academic ability, cannot be avoided.

Given that there are no other useful metrics beyond academic ability, if trying to realize finance distribution on a verified basis, the basis must be efficiency strategy with a focus on academic results.

And yet, even in quantitative economic analysis (which is typically thought to be in the position of promoting efficiency strategy), analyses with the precondition of reducing resource distribution to children are not necessarily being conducted.

Oshio (2012) takes the position of promoting income redistribution among households, pointing out that with attention to measures of children's academic ability, health and so on, since the household is more significant than the school as a regulating factor of academic ability, when trying to remedy not only the academic ability gap deriving from households but also the lifelong health gap, it is first important and "necessary to make policies aiming directly to eradicate child poverty" (Oshio 2012, p. 164).

Regarding the current focus on efficiency strategy in educational resource distribution, what the education finance system and scholars of education should be focusing on is the issue of whether Japan's education finance system and public school system have sufficiently implemented the accountability of public education. In the midst of financial trouble and the adoption of NPM-type administrative methods, when aiming for plentiful financing for in education, it is necessary to prove some kind of results. The effort to present these results in a form ordinary citizens can agree with has not been sufficient by any means.

Fortunately, in Japan, the interest of people and parents in schools is not limited to academic ability. Certainly the main role of compulsory education is to nurture basic academic ability, but there is also a focus on handling problem behavior and nurturing morals and social manners in terms of the effects produced in children by schools.⁷

There is no need at all to make numerical immeasurables the target of quantitative evaluation, but from the point of view of implementing the accountability of public-funded education to the people, the disclosure of accurate data on the metrics of school education is extremely important. For example, in order to lower the percentage of truant students, case studies manipulating the reasons for absence from school on site are plentiful, but this kind of action itself severely affects trust in schools on the ground, and creates a vicious cycle as it invites distrust of budget injections for education.

Constructing a resource distribution system which connects to steps taken toward improvement through budget and personnel, by providing an accurate measure of schools' situations, is effective as incentive design for implementing accountability.

From this perspective, it is important that people working in education be aware of the issue of faithfully implemented accountability which is in the background of efficiency strategy theories, and that they prove the public education system to be one deserving of public funding.

3.3. Communitarianism

In compulsory education finance, since the Revised Local Autonomy Law of 1999, decentralization has made consistent progress. As well, regarding educational reform, a focus has been on “the collaboration among schools, homes, and community members,” and systems focused on the participation of community members and parents have been adopted, such as the school management council system and school support regional headquarters. These reforms involve the idea that the quality and quantity of compulsory education should not be a one-size-fits-all format controlled by the national standard, but should aim for the local optimum.

The active aspect of communitarianist policy, which focuses on community functions, can be found in the creation of “regional individuality” and the increase of community functions through parent and resident participation (Omomo 2005 p. 28, Suzuki/Terawaki 2010 pp. 100–104). However, to leave to the local optimum a significant part of the authority over decisions concerning the quantity and quality of compulsory education would involve the risk of further widening the gap between passive “napping municipalities” and reform-minded municipalities (Nishio 2007, p. 222). As well, while the guarantee of benefits to children who lack the right of political participation is also an issue, the focus on local government and community participation can lead to the loss of the perspective of whether or not children’s education is changing in the right direction. “Whether it is the progress of decentralization or the establishment of schools’ independence and self-regulation, we must consider how education will change in response” (Omomo 2005, p. 31).

In spite of which, the communitarianist norms are attractive to the system of compulsory education finance in that a mechanism exists such as to generate flexible attempts to reframe systematically public education as it has been, while dealing with regional needs.

Approaches to “fee-paying educational opportunities,” guaranteeing cram school services with public funds, are seen in forward-thinking municipalities and schools as already noted. The importance of these approaches is, as shown by the forward-thinking approaches of Hachioji City’s public school for truant students, the free schools for truant students which receive funding assistance in Fukuoka, Kyoto, and Chiba prefectures among others and so on, that local policy decisions are beginning and normalizing the process through which the scope of compulsory education for which public funding is guaranteed is beginning to go beyond the framework of public elementary and junior high schools.

Regarding the appropriateness and systemic issues of guaranteeing cram schools and lessons, services chosen by household budgets, through vouchers or cash supplies from municipalities and schools, the author herself is continuing debate (Suetomi 2010, pp. 122–127). However, as an actual guarantee of educational opportunity, scholars of education must consider what it means that a given number of local governments are choosing to put public funds into extrascholastic education and free schools. Issues of what the scope of public education is and how the educational services newly a target of public funding should be generally guaranteed (or should not be) are the systemic frontier of public education.

Because local efforts provide this kind of frontier to public education, their systematic

suppression cannot be permitted. While actively positioning the seeds of “universal common education” which lie hidden in these local efforts, it is important to evaluate whether they are worth going beyond regions to guarantee, and to discuss what conditions would make their adoption possible in other regions.

4. Conclusion

Returning to the task of this paper, which is to grasp the current issues facing the compulsory education finance system and to show specifically its possible directions for reform, I want in conclusion to sum up the conditions for reform of the education finance system as the basis of compulsory education.

It goes without saying that the most important reorganizational principle for compulsory education finance is egalitarianism.

Regarding public schools, dealing with “individual equality” while compensating for the insufficiency of “aspectual equality” is the basic mindset demanded of compulsory education finance. Specifically needed are the introduction of national standards of personnel placement which can handle the expansion of the national minimum, and school authority over the budget needed for educational activities. In particular, it is urgent to organize the system so as to guarantee the nationwide staffing of positions in special needs education, Japanese (as a second language) education, and school social work, which connect with students’ individual educational needs and welfare support for households. In addition to this, the establishment of finance and authority for schools, the practical organs of compulsory education, is necessary. School decentralization will be an important system reform as the precondition to transparency of compulsory education costs and budget distribution standards, and to effective management of staff and budget. As well, by clarifying the heretofore vague authority relations between schools and local governments, the possibility of strengthening the collaboration between boards of education and schools can also be expected.

As well, there is a need for discussion of the basic rules and system of funding for educational needs which cannot be guaranteed within the framework of public schools. In particular, regarding public funding for extrascholastic education, free schools, and so on, the basic stance sought of educational scholars and policy-makers is to evaluate local efforts actively while judging their results coolly. Eventually, general funding distribution may also take place for extrascholastic education and non-Article 1 schools, in the form of vouchers et cetera for children who have left the public schools and for low-income households; at this time, with these ventures still in their infancy, a flexible stance towards cutting-edge attempts is required.

Regardless of the order in which these ideas are realized, a necessary condition for plentiful compulsory education finance is the implementation of accountability of schools and educational administration. On the track to finance cuts, the fundamental motive power for opening a road out of academic ability-centered efficiency strategy for the compulsory education finance system is to continue faithfully displaying accurate metrics of the educational status quo, and verifying the efforts guaranteeing “a universal common education” to all children living in Japanese society.

Notes

1. MEXT “On Plans for Regional Financial Measures Relating to Costs Needed for Special Needs Education Staffing (Notice)” (27 December, 2006) http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo3/032/siryu/07092101/003/001.htm MEXT “2011 Budget for Special Needs Education (Draft)” http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo3/044/siryu/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2011/03/11/1302940_1_1.pdf
2. MEXT Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Education, Financial Affairs Division, Educational Finance Section “Results of Survey on the Status of Educational Materials-Related Budget Measures in Elementary and Junior High Schools (Notice)” (31 January, 2008) http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/kyozai/08021512/002.pdf
3. All are from the most recently released data (those from Miyagi and Iwate Prefectures in 2011 have been removed through lack of data organization due to the Great East Japan Earthquake). Numbers of special needs education support staff have been calculated from MEXT “On the Status of Special Needs Education Support Staffing and Regional Finance Measures (2008)” (http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/tokubetu/main/005.htm) and MEXT *2008 School Basic Survey*. Calculation methods are the same as those used by Yamamoto (2008, p. 438). Numbers of school counselors in public junior high schools are from MEXT *2010 School Health Statistics*; percentages of earthquake-proofed schools are from MEXT “On the Results of the Earthquake-Proofing Rebuilding Status Survey of Public School Facilities (2010)” (http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/22/07/1295735.htm).
4. MEXT “2010 School Social Workers Activity Case Studies” http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/seitoshidou/1312658.htm
5. Regarding teachers of Japanese as a second language, the need for a clear staffing standard is pointed out in MEXT “Policy Discussions Regarding the Education etc. of Children of Resident Foreigners.” http://www.mext.go.jp/component/b_menu/other/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2010/07/07/1294686_2.pdf
6. MEXT “Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education,” p. 8. http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/keikaku/080701/002.pdf
7. Benesse/Asahi Shimbun Joint Survey “Survey of Parent Attitudes on School Education, 2008” http://benesse.jp/berd/center/open/report/hogosya_ishiki/2008/soku/index.html

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