Synopsis of the Report “National Curriculum Standards Reform for Kindergarten, Elementary School, Lower and Upper Secondary School and Schools for the Visually Disabled, the Hearing Impaired and the Otherwise Disabled"

July 29, 1998

The Curriculum Council

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**Preface**

The Curriculum Council received an inquiry from the Minister of Education in August 1996 about "reform of the national curriculum standards of kindergarten, elementary school, lower and upper secondary schools and schools for the visually disabled, the hearing impaired and the otherwise disabled". The Council comprehensively discussed how to help children's well-balanced development and how to educate them to be sound members of the nation and the society living independently in the 21st century.

The Council reached the conclusion that the national curriculum standards should be reformed as follows.

In addition, the Council agreed that it was necessary to constantly review the national curriculum standards for improvement. Thus, the Curriculum Council that is established to reform the standards as the occasion demands under the current system should be a standing one.

**I. Fundamental approach to national curriculum standards reform**

**A. Fundamental approach to national curriculum standards reform**

(Hope of children’s sound development and hope for school's role)

Education is a task to help children develop their own identity and faculties from early childhood to adolescence and is not just school's responsibility. Schools, families and communities must cooperate and effectively demonstrate their individual educational function. Such well-balanced education is the key to children's sound development.

Specifically, children's life style and learning environment need to be changed, and the roles of schools, families and communities need to be reviewed. *School's primary role is to motivate children to learn and to teach them how to learn.* Families and communities are expected to recognize their roles in education and to do their part successfully.

*School should be a pleasant place for children to feel relaxed. The school's role is to satisfy children by providing them opportunities to receive recognition and to realize the self while they interact with one another and with teachers in classes and in other school activities.*

The Council deliberated the national curriculum standards reform from the following standpoints while hoping for children's sound development and expecting schools to play the important role as stated above.

1. Basic role in each stage of education

Our discussions about the basic role in each stage of education are summarized below.

The kindergarten's basic role is to give comprehensive guidance through playful *hands-on learning activities* which highly value children's own desire, willingness and interests. *The kindergarten education aims at helping children cultivate rich heart and imagination as the fundamentals of a good human being, willingness to deal with matters and sound mind to have sound life.*

The elementary school education aims at helping children acquire essential knowledge, skills and mind to have healthy social life as an individual as well as a member of the society / nation. It also aims at helping children develop rich humanity, recognize their own charm and individuality through interactions with others and foster mind of self-reliance.

The lower secondary school education aims at helping students acquire essential knowledge, skills and mind to have healthy social life as an individual as well as a member of the society / nation.

It also aims at helping students foster rich humanity, recognize and develop their own individuality and further cultivate mind of self reliance.

The upper secondary education aims at helping students appreciate the meaning of their own life, develop mind and ability to choose career and deepen understanding of the society. Depending upon students' interests, the upper secondary education will provide them opportunities to learn the basics in the specialties of their choices and will encourage them to further develop individualities and independence.

Schools for the visually disabled, the hearing impaired and the otherwise disabled provide education equivalent to kindergarten, elementary school and lower and upper secondary schools. The special education aims at helping students develop knowledge and skills necessary to improve and overcome various difficulties related to their current nature of disability, develop individuality to the maximum, and cultivate capability and ability necessary to independently participate in social activities.

2. Current state of children and curriculum implementation, and educational issues

The importance of the emotional education is focused on under such problematic behavior as bullying among children, their refusal to go to school, juvenile delinquency and children's poor morality and sociality.

In addition, it is pointed out that teachers do not well understand the significance of moral education nor make much efforts. It is also mentioned that schools are less active to practice the moral education.

Under the present curriculum, the academic achievement of Japanese children is satisfactory overall. However, there are several issues existing:

(i) considerable number of children do not fully understand class content,

(ii) children's abilities to independently research, judge and express themselves have not yet fully developed,

(iii) children's abilities to view things from different angles are not yet satisfactory and

(iv) children are not highly motivated to study.

3. Acquisition of the "absolute value in all ages"

Education must help children securely acquire the "absolute value in all ages" in this kaleidoscopic world.

4. Cultivation of children's ability to flexibly cope with social changes

Education is expected to help children develop ability to anticipate social changes and to cope with them flexibly.

5. Educational contents under the comprehensive five-day school week system

Taking the opportunity of the initiation of the comprehensive five-day school week system, we all must keep it in mind that education cannot be completed only by school education, and that the important role of school education is to lay the foundations of lifelong learning. On the basis of this understanding, educational activities should be developed.

6. Close examination of educational content and thorough acquisition of the basics

The educational content will be closely examined and limited to the very basics necessary for further study and daily life. Students will study the selected basics repeatedly until they thoroughly master the content.

The close examination of educational content is not conducted only for reducing school hours in response to the implementation of the comprehensive five-day school week. It is rather intended to allow children to study repeatedly without haste and to take their time to concentrate on *hands-on learning activities and problem-solving activities.*

7. Teaching strategy and grading method

A student's academic ability should not be measured by the quantity of knowledge acquired; it should rather be assessed by whether or not he/she has acquired the "zest for living" such as ability to learn and think independently. However, he/she is expected to have acquired adequate knowledge and skills as a prerequisite for it.

The grading method for each subject also needs to be improved in consideration of students' ages (grades) and specific features of each subject

**B. Purposes of national curriculum standards reform**

1. To help children cultivate rich humanity, sociality and identity as a Japanese living in the international community

Children will be encouraged to cultivate well-balanced rich humanity and sociality. Rich humanity includes sympathy, mind to respect each other and live together in harmony, respect for life and human rights, sensibility of appreciating beauty and the environment, volunteer spirit, mind to make efforts to achieve one's own goal and the like. High value will be set on moral education which helps children acquire social rules and basic morality, a sense of norms, public morals, justice and fairness, sound judgment, strong will and ability to take action, awareness of responsibility, autonomy, self-control and the like. In addition, children's healthy development and physical strength are also emphasized for them to lead vigorous lives.

Children will be encouraged to deepen their understanding of national as well as local history, culture and tradition, and to develop love to those matters. They will also be encouraged to appreciate different cultures open-mindedly, and to cultivate the mind of international cooperation and the identity as Japanese living in the international community.

2. To help children develop ability to learn and think independently

There was a tendency for school education to emphasize volumes of knowledge. Now, however, the school education looks itself from the children's standpoint and places a high value on the development of children's intellectual interests and inquiring minds. Thus, *the school education positively conducts its activities by emphasizing the importance of motivating children to learn by themselves and helping them develop abilities to learn, reason, judge, express themselves accurately, discover and solve problems, acquire basic creativity and act independently in response to social changes.*

*Additionally, children are encouraged to use their knowledge and skills comprehensively in daily life in order to successfully relate their knowledge acquired at school with the actual life.*

This requires the promotion of such educational activities as hands-on learning activities, problem-solving activities and activities to teach how to research and how to learn.

3. To help children acquire basic abilities and skills and grow their own individuality with plenty of scope for educational activities

Schools will effectively help children acquire the selected educational content thoroughly by conducting educational activities without pressure of time or stress They will also encourage children to study independently what they are interested in.

The common contents of compulsory education will be closely examined so as to consist of the very basics necessary for the social life. Education for growing children's individuality will also be focused on. Thus, considering children's interests, schools need to promote children's independent learning and to further develop individualized instruction. In addition, the elective course system will be introduced to the fifth graders and older at elementary school, and there will be more elective subjects for higher graders at lower secondary school. At upper secondary school, elective subjects will take the most part of the curriculum and common subjects will be minimized.

4. To encourage individual schools to show ingenuity in developing unique educational activities to make the school distinctive

The national curriculum standards will be clearly specified and more flexible so that individual schools will be able to show ingenuity in developing unique educational activities to make the school distinctive.

Specifically, each school will be able to make its own timetable and curriculum in accordance with the actual situations of the community, school and children. In addition, the number of elective subjects will be increased and the "*Period for Integrated Study*" will be established to further promote each school's unique educational activities.

Moreover, schools will be encouraged to establish a good relationship with families and communities and to be more open to them.

**C. Basic principles regarding common issues to all stages of school education and all subjects**

1. Moral education

Schools will be encouraged to develop distinctive approaches suitable to the stage of child development in accordance with the actual situations of the community, school and children. Schools are also expected to positively adopt hands-on learning approach and practical activities, such as volunteer activities and hands-on learning activities in the environment. Particularly, preschool children and lower graders of elementary schools need to be given the basic discipline and repeatedly taught what they should not do as a human being, what is right and what is wrong until they understand thoroughly.

2. Response to internationalization

Great emphasis will be placed on the education that encourages children to appreciate different cultures open-mindedly and develop capabilities and abilities to live in harmony with people of different cultures and customs. At the same time, children will be inspired to be proud of and feel love of Japanese history, culture and tradition as well as deepen their understanding of those. Much value will be set on the improvement of fundamental and practical communicative competence in foreign languages and the subject of ''Foreign Language will be a required one at lower and upper secondary schools. Elementary schools will provide hands-on learning activities to expose children to foreign languages and help them get familiar with foreign life and culture in the "Period for Integrated Study".

3. Response to the information-oriented society

Consistent and systematic information education through all stages of school education will require sufficient improvement of related subjects and active use of computers in virtually every subject.

Elementary schools will employ computers for children's learning activities in the "Period for Integrated Study" and other classes.

Lower secondary school will require students to learn the information basics including basic computer skills in industrial art and homemaking class. Upper secondary school will establish a new required subject area of "Information Study".

4. Response to environmental issues

Children will deepen their understanding of the environment and energy issues and develop respect for the environment. They will be encouraged to develop practical mind and ability to voluntarily take actions to preserve the environment and make it better. Thus, great emphasis will be placed on problem-solving and hands-on learning approaches. In consideration of the actual situation of the region, the environmental education will be enhanced in related classes as well as in the "Period for Integrated Study".

5. Response to the aging society with declining birth rate

Children need to deepen their understanding of the aging society with declining birth rate and the significance of child-rearing by the united efforts of both sexes. They also need to develop practical minds to voluntarily take actions for the elderly. For these purposes, related classes and the "Period for Integrated Study" will provide children with opportunities to have basic idea of the aging society with declining birth rate, to learn the meaning of family and child-rearing and to deepen their understanding of such related issues as nursing and welfare.

Specifically, great emphasis will be placed on actual interaction with infants and elderly people and volunteer activities related to nursing and welfare.

Furthermore, the teaching strategy should be improved in order for children to learn the importance of physical health and their physical condition and to be able to appropriately deal with various related issues.

6. Interdisciplinary and comprehensive learning; clearly specified and more flexible national curriculum standards

The national curriculum standards will be clearly specified and become more flexible so that each school will be able to show ingenuity in teaching. Specifically, class object and content for two or more school years will be shown together depending on the characteristics of the subject, and schools and students will be given more choices.

The "Period for Integrated Study" will be established to encourage schools to make efforts to further develop distinctive education and interdisciplinary and comprehensive teaching activities.

**II. Organization of curriculum and framework of school hours**

**A. Organization of curriculum**

The "Period for Integrated Study" will be added to the existing subjects and then curricula will be organized for elementary school, lower and upper secondary schools and schools for the visually disabled, the hearing impaired and the otherwise disabled.

**B. "Period for Integrated Study"**

1. The "Period for Integrated Study" will be established in order for individual schools to be able to develop distinctive education and to make efforts to conduct interdisciplinary and comprehensive teaching activities.

2. The "Period for Integrated Study" aims at helping children develop capability and *ability to discover problems by themselves and solve those problems properly.* Interdisciplinary and comprehensive studies, which reflect each individual schools' efforts, and *studies* *based* *upon* *children's* *own* *interests* will help achieve this goal. It also aims at helping children learn how to learn and reason, develop mind to independently and creatively cope with problem-solving activities and/or inquiring activities, and deepen their understanding of their own way of life.

It is assumed that children's knowledge and skills acquired in individual classes will be related with each other and deepened through the activities in the "Period for Integrated Study", and then they will work comprehensively for children.

3. The specification of "Period for Integrated Study" in the national curriculum standards will be only its aim, school's obligation of its establishment in the curriculum and the standard of its school hours. The content will not be prescribed as it is for other subjects. The course title is “Period for Integrated Study" in the national curriculum standards, but individual schools can name it whatever they like.

4. Individual schools are expected to make efforts to develop activities for the "Period for Integrated Study". Specifically, learning activities will be developed starting from setting tasks and/or activities according to the subject. Subjects can be, for example, interdisciplinary and comprehensive studies such as *international understanding, information, environment, welfare and health, subjects which children are interested in and those closely related to the community and school's characteristics.*

When elementary school children study conversation in foreign languages, learning activities should be hands-on activities appropriate for their ages. For example, children can be exposed to foreign languages and get familiar with foreign life and culture.

Taking advantage of the "Period for Integrated Study", upper secondary schools should consider activities for students to deepen and put together their knowledge and skills for the tasks they have set independently and to examine themselves, their own way of life and their future plans.

5. Annually, 105 or 110 school hours will be allocated to the "Period for Integrated Study" for the third graders and older at elementary school, and more than 70 school hours annually for lower secondary school students (cf. Chart I and 2). Upper secondary school students will have 105-210 credits in total.

**C. Basic policies on school hours**

1. The current total school hours per annum will be reduced by the 70 school hours, which represent the existing Saturday school hours (2 school hours per week).

2. Restrictions on total annual school weeks and on one school hour will be relaxed so that each school can show ingenuity in forming a timetable and curriculum.

**III. Curriculum and school hours in each stage of school education**

**A. Kindergarten curriculum and educational hours**

1. The educational content will consist of the following *five existing fields: "health". "human relations", "environment", "language" and "expression".* The kindergarten education will provide children with individualized and comprehensive guidance through their joyful group activities centering on play, which is their independent activities.

2. Relaxation of restrictions governing kindergarten management will be enhanced so that kindergartens will be more open to the community and provide day-care service and other services to meet the local and guardians' needs.

**B. Elementary school curriculum and annual school hours**

1. The composition of subjects and school hours at elementary school are shown in the Chart 1.

2. The educational content of each subject will be closely examined and limited to the very basics. Children will be repeatedly taught the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, which are fundamental to daily life and further study, and encouraged to acquire the content thoroughly.

Certain elements of the elective course system will be introduced to the fifth graders and older in order to help children obtain basic ability to select.

**C. Lower secondary school curriculum and annual school hours**

1. The composition of subjects and school hours at lower secondary school are shown in the Chart 2. “Foreign Language" is a required subject.

2. The educational content of required subjects will be closely examined and limited to the very basics necessary for leading a sound social life, and the school hours for these subjects will be reduced. The emphasis is on the students' thorough acquisition of the basics.

3. The number of elective subjects will be increased so that all subjects will be open to all students. Content of electives will be each school's responsibility, and thus the school will be able to conduct more diverse educational activities including task-oriented learning, supplementary class and advanced class. In addition, the maximum school hours of each elective will be increased to 70 school hours a year.

**D. Upper secondary school curriculum, the total numbers of credits for required subject areas/subjects and for the completion of the upper secondary education**

1. Upper secondary school curriculum and the total numbers of credits for required subject areas/subjects

a. Required subject areas/subjects

All students of upper secondary schools need to acquire sufficient knowledge of the basics in a well-balanced manner no matter what course they choose in the future. The followings will be required of all three courses of the general education, the specialized education and the integrated education.

(i) "Foreign Language" will be a required subject area. A new required subject area of “Information Study" will be established in the general education course curriculum.

(ii) The standard number of credits for each subject area/subject and required subjects are shown in the Chart 3.

(iii) The total number of credits for required subject areas/subjects will be reduced to 31 credits from the current minimum of 38 credits in the general education course and 35 credits in the specialized and the integrated education courses.

b. Subject areas/subjects other than those specified in the Course of Study may be added more flexibly to the general education course curriculum.

c. In the specialized education course, the total number of credits required for the specialized subject areas/subjects will be reduced to 25 credits from the current 30 credits.

The vocational subject areas of "Welfare Study" and "Information Study" will be established. The required subjects common to every subject area will be two in total; the one is to be consisted of the very basic content and the other is “task-based research" for cultivating problem-solving ability.

d. In the integrated education course, "Man and Industrialized Society" will be a required subject and the number of credits for specialized subject areas/subjects will be 25 credits in total including that for "Man and Industrialized Society".

2. Total number of credits required for the completion of upper secondary education

a. The total number of credits required to complete upper secondary school education will be reduced to 74 credits from the current 80 credits.

b. The standard weekly credit hours for a full-time student will be reduced to 30 credit hours from the current 32 credit hours.

3. Part-time and correspondence courses

The credit system will be more broadly used in the part-time courses and the educational approach will be improved in the correspondence courses.

**E. Curricula and annual school hours for schools for the visually disabled, the hearing impaired and the otherwise disabled**

The curricula will be improved in accordance with the reformed curricula for kindergarten, elementary school and lower and upper secondary schools. In response to the social changes and the nature of disabilities of children (such as severity, multiplicity and diversity of disabilities), the following reforms will also be implemented to help disabled children develop their individuality and cultivate the "zest for living" that is a prerequisite for their independent participation in social activities.

a. In response to the social changes, the school for the mentally retarded will establish elective subject areas of "Foreign Language" in the lower secondary department and "Foreign Language" and "Information Study" in the upper secondary department to help students adapt themselves smoothly to the social life after finishing school. In addition, the upper secondary department will establish a new subject area "Distribution and Service" on the distribution industry and the service industry, and new courses such as "Commercial Course" and "Industrial Course" will be established.

b. The school hours for nursing and rehabilitation activities will be decided appropriately by individual schools in order for children to be able to receive individualized instruction suitable to their condition. The title of the class will be renamed "Activities for Independence".

c. Schools need to make individualized instruction plans suitable to each child's condition when giving instruction of nursing and rehabilitation activities and giving instruction to the multi-disabled.

d. The following programs will be specified in the Course of Study: the visit-and-teach program in upper secondary department, the special class program in elementary and lower secondary schools, and the program under which disabled children can take regular classes and receive special instruction.

e. The interaction program of disabled children and healthy children and/or members of the community will be specified in the Courses of Study for kindergarten, elementary, lower and upper secondary schools in order to further promote the program.

**F. Curriculum for the consistent 6-year high school education**

1. In principle, the lower secondary school curriculum standard will be applied to the first half of the consistent 6-year high school education and the upper secondary school curriculum standard will be applied to the latter half. The following special measures are introduced to form distinctive curriculum for the consistent 6-year high school.

a. In the first half, (i) the upper limit of the school hours for each elective subject area will be eased, and (ii) the school hours for required subject areas can be counted as those for elective subject areas within the limits of 70 credit hours annually (2 credit hours per week).

b. In the latter half, the credits for "other subjects" and "other indispensable subject areas" can be counted among the required credits for completion of school in the general education course within the limits of 20 credits currently. However, the upper limit will be eased.

**IV. Content of subject areas and subjects**

**A. Kindergarten**

1. The fundamental concept of kindergarten education, that is to provide each child with individualized and comprehensive guidance in the playful environment, will be maintained. It will be clarified that, to secure abundant voluntary actions by children, teachers deliberately organize desirable environment based on their proper understanding of preschool children. Also the teacher's basic role, such as a teacher's part in children's playing activities, will be specified. The following reforms will also be implemented.

(a) To employ more activities to develop children's mental and physical health as well as to improve moral education in order for them to acquire appropriate morality in daily life.

(b) To emphasize the importance of providing children with opportunities to have personal and actual live experiences through hands-on learning activities in the environment and in communities.

(c) To clearly indicate the model education that stimulates children's intellectual development.

(d) To carefully respond to specific features of child development in early childhood when self-consciousness and self-restraint start growing.

(e) To encourage children to have self-realization through group activities.

2. Kindergartens should provide children ample opportunities to enjoy activities suitable to their ages. At the same time, they must have tighter cooperation with elementary schools and consider children's successful transition to the elementary school education from the kindergarten's comprehensive instruction in the playful environment.

3. Furthermore, kindergartens will be open to communities and promote day-care service to meet the diverse needs of families and communities and in response to the declining birth rate. Kindergartens and nursery schools will be encouraged to promote flexible management such as the common use of facilities including a build-to-share system. The cooperation will also be promoted in terms of the content of education/nursing, supporting child-rearing, and training and in-service training for kindergarten teachers and nurses.

**B. Elementary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools**

**1. Japanese Language**

a. The previous approach emphasized that students read and comprehended the details of literary works. Now, however, great emphasis is placed on students' having their own ideas and on the development of their ability to reason, express themselves appropriately depending on the purpose and the situation and comprehend the content of reading accurately. The development of mind to get familiar with reading is also considered. Therefore, the Japanese Language education will consist of three categories, "speaking/listening", and "reading", instead of current two categories. "expression" and "comprehension". Thus, such class activities as giving explanations, holding debates and making reports will be recommended.

b. The teaching strategy that places emphasis on students' detailed reading comprehension of literary works will be reformed so as to teach children appropriately depending upon the stage of child development.

For example, the content currently taught in every grade at elementary school, such as paragraphing, will be taught in a specific grade.

c. The educational content of two school years will be shown together in elementary and lower secondary schools so as to teach flexibly in consideration of the actual situation of the students and school.

d. The instruction of Kanji (Chinese characters) will basically be the same as the current one in terms of the characters and the number of Kanji in the compulsory education. However, plenty of time will be assigned to the instruction of writing Kanji so that students can take time to master writing them before they go up a grade.

e. Classics and calligraphy will continue to be taught appropriately.

f. Upper secondary schools will establish a new subject "Japanese Language Expression I" whose content mainly consists of the categories of "speaking/listening" and “writing”, and it will be an elective required subject.

**2. Social Studies, Geography and History, Civics**

a. Great emphasis is placed on the development of children's capabilities required as Japanese in the international society. The capabilities include mind and ability to study both domestic and international incidents from various angles and then to make judgments in a fair fashion, understanding and love of their country and its history, and the spirit of international cooperation. Thus, schools will encourage students to learn how to study and research and to participate in hands-on learning activities and problem-solving activities, rather than placing too much emphasis on students' knowledge of all matters.

b. The matters to be taught will be closely examined and the very basics will be selected. The content considered difficult for that graders will be taught in the next grade and upper or will be eliminated.

c. History classes should help students respect Japanese culture and tradition and deepen their understanding and love of its history.

Historical events and phenomena taught at elementary school will be selected more carefully, and the focus of history classes will be the learning of achievements by historical figures and typical cultural properties. In history classes at lower secondary school, students will study Japanese history together with world history as background knowledge. Japanese history will be shown in large sections, so that students can grasp the major flow of the history. The students will also be expected to view things from different angles by learning how to study and examine history. Considering the consistency with lower secondary schools, upper secondary schools will help students deepen their understanding of Japanese and world history and develop their ability to think from a historical point of view.

d. At elementary school, the learning of the local community for the third and the forth graders and the learning of Japanese industry and national land for the fifth graders will be integrated. In this way, the learning rooted in the local community and the learning using various data or through research can be conducted more concretely and flexibly.

e. In geography classes at lower secondary school, students will be encouraged to acquire the basics of Japanese and the world geography and learn how to view things and find characteristics of local areas through various examples. In civics classes, students will study mainly the basics of politics and economy by examining specific cases.

d. The task-based study approach will be employed in geography/history class and civics class at upper secondary school.

The emphasis will also be placed on the study in which students can learn to think or view things from historical or geographical points.

Moreover, students are encouraged to develop the ability to think various issues in the modern society as well as the way of life as a human.

**3. Arithmetic, Mathematics**

a. Children will be helped to acquire basic knowledge and skills of quantity and geometrical figure through problem-solving activities with plenty of time, while the relevance to the real life is being considered.

Children will be expected to develop ability to think mathematically and to cultivate creativity.

b. The teaching contents will be reduced to the ones necessary to daily life and the content considered difficult for that graders will be taught in the next grade or upper. The amount of the reduced contents will be greater than the assumed reduction by the shortened school hours.

c. Elementary school children can take their time to learn arithmetic and they will be repeatedly taught until they master the basic computation skills. For this, the teaching contents including character equations, congruence and symmetry of geometrical figures, three-dimensional figures such as a cone, and direct/inverse proportional expressions will be taught at lower secondary school. The complex calculation of large numbers and the content of geometrical figures will be simplified.

d. Lower secondary schools will help students acquire basic knowledge of quantity and geometry. The emphasis will be placed on the development of students' ability to reason and thus the problem-solving approach to learning will be positively adopted.

The teaching contents including a linear inequality with one unknown, a formula of the solution to a quadratic equation, some characteristics of a circle and statistics will be taught at upper secondary school.

e. Upper secondary schools will establish a new subject of "Basic Mathematics" which incorporates mathematical history and statistical processing of daily events, and it will be an elective required subject.

**4. Science**

a. Science classes should be well related to children's experiences in the environment and daily life and encourage children to make observations and experiments for their own purposes; The emphasis will be placed on children's development of intellectual interest and inquiring mind toward the environment, and abilities to solve problems and view things variously and comprehensively.

b. The content considered difticult for that graders will be taught in the next grade or upper or even eliminated, and the teaching contents that relates closely to the environment in the neighborhood and daily life will be prioritized. The amount of the reduced contents will be more than that for the reduction of credit hours.

c. At elementary school, experiments and observations of the environment in the neighborhood and learning related to daily life will be prioritized. Some of the current teaching contents of elementary schools such as plants' transpiration, neutralization, metal combustion and movement of stars will be taught at lower secondary school.

d. Lower secondary schools will conduct more of outdoor observations and exploratory activities. Some of the current teaching contents of lower secondary schools such as ions, composition/decomposition of force, the characteristics of Japanese climate, regulations of heredity, and biological evolution will be taught at upper secondary school.

e. Upper secondary schools will establish three new subjects as an elective required subject. One is "Basic Science" that will help students learn science history and the relation between human life and science in order to develop their scientific perception and thinking. Another is "Comprehensive Science A" for researching natural phenomena closely related to daily life including material and energy, and the other is "Comprehensive Science B" for studying biological phenomena and natural phenomena on the global environment.

**5. Life Environment Studies**

a. Children's activities and experiences in communities, in the environment and with people in their neighborhood will further be promoted. The teaching contents for two school years will be shown together so that various activities can be elaborated further, and the current 12 contents will be reexamined and restricted to 8 contents. In addition, interaction with infants, elderly people and disabled children will be further promoted.

**6. Music, Arts (Music)**

a. Music classes will emphasize that children enjoy music, find pleasure in musical activities and have mind to appreciate music throughout their lives.

b. Plenty of time will be allocated to the flexible instruction suitable to the actual situations of individual community, school and children. For example, children will be allowed to choose the contents they wish to learn and the teaching contents for two school years will be shown together.

c. Activities of self-expression and music appreciation will be improved in order for students to deepen their interests and understanding of the music culture in Japan as well as those in foreign countries. Additionally, the instruction of the national anthem "Kimigayo" will be enhanced.

d. In principle, common teaching materials for appreciation will not be shown in order for individual elementary and lower secondary schools to develop various music activities suitable to the actual situation of individual community and school. And only advice on choosing materials will be given. Elementary school's teaching materials for singing will be chosen among the songs recommended by the Ministry of Education since people have loved them for many years. At lower secondary school, the advice on choosing materials will be given but specific pieces will not be shown.

**7. Drawing and Handicrafts, Fine Arts, Arts (Fine Arts, Craft)**

a. It will be emphasized that children enjoy creative activities of drawing and crafting now and throughout their lives.

b. Plenty of time will be given to the flexible instruction suitable to the actual situations of individual community, school and children. For example, the teaching contents for two school years will be shown together and children will be allowed to choose contents they wish to learn.

c. Elementary school children will be encouraged to make crafts by using their hands skillfully. Lower and upper secondary schools will encourage students to deepen their understanding of the characteristics of Japanese as well as other countries' culture of art. The activities for appreciating works of art are also important to help students refine their skills.

**8. Fine Arts (Calligraphy)**

a. It will be emphasized that students enjoy calligraphy and have a love for calligraphy throughout their lives, and at the same time, individualized and creative learning activities will be promoted.

**9. Homemaking, Industrial Arts and Home Economics**

a. It is necessary to consider the promotion of the cooperative society of both sexes and the aging society with declining birth rate. The emphasis will be on the children's understanding of family relations and family functions, their acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for daily life, and the development of enthusiasm and practical mind to improve their lives. Thus, further improvements will be made on the teaching contents including family functions, family relations, significance of raising a child, relation between daily life and industrial arts, and active use of information devices.

b. In order to allow enough time to the instruction suitable to the actual situation of the community and school, some teaching contents will be eliminated or integrated into the basics, classification will be done by larger categories or teaching materials will not be specified.

c. The teaching contents for two school years will be shown together and the teaching materials will be limited to the minimum essentials in order for elementary schools to give flexible instruction suitable to the actual situation of the school and children. In addition, nutritious combinations of food and simple cooking will be taught in the "food" section, and making some simple and small items useful for daily life will be taught in the "clothing" section.

d. At lower secondary school, the subject currently consists of eleven categories such as "timber processing", "electricity", ' life", "food" and the like. It will be reorganized so as to consist of two categories of "industrial arts" and "homemaking".

The "industrial arts" will emphasize the content related to manufacturing and basic skills for computer processing. The "homemaking" will emphasize the content related to clothing, food and housing, which are necessary to lead an independent life, such as nutritious eating habits, and the content related to family, family relations and consumer life.

e. Upper secondary schools will establish a new subject of Home Economics" on human life and family/welfare, family life and physical health, consumer life and environment, and the like. The current "General Home Economics" will be improved and split into "Integrated Home Economics" and "Home Life Techniques". Students will be allowed to choose among these three subjects.

**10. Physical Education, Health and Physical Education**

a. In order for children to cultivate mind to enjoy sport throughout their lives and maintain and improve their physical health, physical exercises in the physical education will be carefully chosen according to the stage of child development and children will be helped to improve their basic physical strength.

The health education will help children learn the importance of health and lead a healthy life. Consideration should be given to the improvement of the instruction that relates physical education and health education.

b. Physical exercises will be more freely chosen in physical education. In health education, various contemporary issues will be selectively discussed and some teaching contents will be eliminated in consideration of the relation with other subjects.

c. A new teaching content, "stretch" (tentative name), will be adopted in the physical education at elementary school and lower and upper secondary schools, and the martial arts will continue to be taught appropriately. Flexible measures will be taken. For example, a physical exercise currently instructed in two consecutive years at elementary school may be instructed in one year, and the system in which students choose the field and content of physical exercises will be expanded in lower and upper secondary schools.

d. Due to the recent changes in circumstances, human behavior and disease structure, the following problems are getting more and more serious: mental health problems, improper eating habits and other bad habits, diseases caused by bad habits, drug abuse problem, issues surrounding sex, and the like. Thus, the emphasis will be on the instruction related to these problems. The teaching contents of health education, currently taught to the fifth graders and older at elementary school, will be taught to the third graders and older.

**11. Foreign Languages.**

a. 'Foreign Language" will be a required subject at lower and upper secondary schools, and in principle, English will be the one at lower secondary school. In order for students to develop practical communicative competence in the target language, great emphasis will be placed on the practice in the situations where the target language is actually used. Listening and speaking practice will be particularly emphasized at lower secondary school.

b. The teaching contents of three school years will be shown together so that lower secondary schools can allocate plenty of time to flexible teaching. Moreover, sentence patterns, grammar and vocabulary will be closely examined and will be limited to the basics necessary for the practice activities. Some teaching contents will be eliminated.

c. At lower secondary school, daily situations where the target language is actually used will be introduced, and functions of such discourse as "greeting", "making requests" and the like will be demonstrated.

Adopting this approach, lower secondary schools will provide various activities in order for students to use the target language in context.

d. Upper secondary schools will offer two subjects in English. The one is "Oral Aural Communication I" that mainly provides oral communication practice, and the other is "English I" that provides comprehensive communication activities. Students can choose between these two considering their achievement at lower secondary school. In addition, teaching foreign languages other than English will be further promoted.

**12. Information Study**

a. Upper secondary school will establish a new general subject area, "Information Study", as a required area. It aims at helping students develop ability to independently choose, process and send information by appropriately using such information devices as computers and information communication networks. It will also help develop sound mind to participate in the information-oriented society.

b. There will be three subjects established under the subject area of "Information Study". The one is "Information A" on the use of a computer and information communication networks. Another is "Information B" that is for the scientific understanding of the functions and mechanism of a computer. The other is "Information C" on the role and influence of information communication networks on the society.

Students can choose one among them.

**13. Subject Areas / Subjects for Professional Education**

a. In appropriate response to social changes and industrial trend, the contents of vocational subject areas/subjects will be carefully examined to help students master basic technical knowledge and skills necessary to work as specialists in future. In addition, practical and experiential learning activities, such as experiments and practical training, will be enhanced.

b. As the aging society is growing, training students for welfare activities, such as social worker training, is a pressing task. For this, a new subject area "Welfare" will be added. In response to the need of training students for information related business in the advanced information communication society, a new subject area "Information Study" will be started.

c. Each subject area will be improved as follows.

(i) Home Economics: The teaching contents related to day-care, home nursing and nursing will be improved. The other contents will also be improved in consideration of the advancement of the consumer-related industry and its intensified services orientation, and diversification of consumer needs.

(ii) Agriculture: The teaching contents will be improved in consideration of internationalization and information-oriented movement in terms of distribution of farm products and personnel exchange, advancement of biotechnology, global environmental issues, development of the food industry, and revitalization of weekend activities in farming and mountain villages.

(iii) Manufacturing: The teaching contents will be improved in consideration of technological innovation in multimedia, advanced information communication technology, systematized manufacturing technology and other areas, communicative competence in foreign languages and ability to comprehend technological reports in response to the internationalization of the manufacturing industry, and environmental issues.

(iv) Business: The teaching contents related to the business basics, including practical communicative competence in foreign languages and information/accounting literacy, will be enhanced. Improvements will be made on the teaching contents related to the processing and utilization of management information of purchase, sales, finance and the like.

(v) Marine Products Industry: The teaching contents will be improved in consideration of the advancement of marine products technology, oceanic environmental issues, the changes related to the industry such as oceanic recreation, internationalization and information-oriented movement of distribution of marine products and personnel exchange, the advancement of communication technology and the like.

(vi) Nursing: The teaching contents will be improved in order to meet the growing social needs of medical treatment and nursing at home.

(vii) Welfare: Students will be encouraged to comprehensively acquire practical basic knowledge and skills related to social welfare and understand its philosophy and meaning. It also aims at helping students develop creative ability and mind to contribute to the advancement of social welfare.

(viii) Information Study: It will help students acquire basic knowledge and skills related to information and understand its meaning and role in the modern society. It also aims at helping students develop creative and practical ability and mind to independently deal with various issues of the advanced information communication society and to contribute to the development of the society.

**14. Moral Education**

a. *It is important for moral education to touch children's hearts through hands-on learning activities and to enhance itself in cooperation with families and communities. Great emphasis is placed on the promotion of such moral education that encourages children to tackle problems by themselves and think together for the better future.* Thus, the approach will be improved so that children can cultivate mind to respect life, an independent spirit, a sense of responsibility, basic morals including knowing good and bad, mind to respect and develop Japanese culture and tradition, a spirit of international cooperation, and practical ability to develop their own lives and the society for the future.

b. Adequate school hours should be secured for the moral class as the core of moral education at elementary and lower secondary schools, and each school should deal with a certain topic for two and more years consecutively. Positive adoption of the following hands-on learning activities is also recommended: volunteer activities, hands-on learning activities in the environment, observations and research, touching real things, role-playing and the like.

c. The approach should be suitable to the stage of child development in the moral class and other moral education at elementary and lower secondary schools. Specifically, at elementary school, the first and the second graders will be repeatedly taught until they learn social rules and acquire the knowledge of good and bad. The third and the forth graders will learn the importance of studying cooperatively and of helping each other, and the fifth and the sixth graders will be encouraged to develop an independent spirit and understanding of Japanese culture and tradition. Lower secondary school students are helped to lead a well-disciplined life, realize themselves as a Japanese citizen and cultivate a spirit of international cooperation.

d. At upper secondary school, civics class, homeroom activities and other activities should be improved in order to help students independently study what life one should lead and how as a human being and develop themselves successfully. Thus, great emphasis will be placed on their development of mind to fulfill their own duty and responsibility, volunteer spirit, and moral sense as a member of the better nation and society.

**15. Special Activities**

a. Special activities will emphasize that students have desirable human relations, acquire basic morals and social rules, develop independent and practical mind to cooperatively build a better life, and cultivate practical mind. It is necessary to improve the functions of student guidance and develop rich hands-on learning activities. In addition, students are encouraged to foster their Japanese identity and cultivate a spirit of international cooperation, and thus the meaning of Japanese flag and anthem will be taught widely.

b. In consideration of the stage of child development, children are encouraged to develop mind to consider what life they should lead in the future and ability to independently make a right choice. The function of student guidance will be improved in order to help children adapt themselves to the school life and build a sound relationship with others.

c. Children will be encouraged to tackle various issues by themselves for the better class and school life in the homeroom activities. Specifically, the approach will be improved in order for students in lower and upper secondary schools to learn what life they should lead and how as a human being and the significance of participating in such social activities as volunteer activities.

d. Activities which help children cultivate volunteer spirits will be enhanced among school events. The hands-on learning activities in the environment and interactions with infants and elderly people will be positively adopted as school events, while the number of school events will be limited overall by combination or integration of events.

e. In consideration of the relations of club activities with extracurricular activities, out-of-school activities and the "Period for Integrated Study", elementary school will allot reasonable class hours to the club activities. Lower and upper secondary schools will eliminate club activities.

**C. Schools for the visually disabled, the hearing impaired and otherwise disabled**

a. In order to further emphasize the necessity of taking educational measures in early stage of child development, the matters related to educational counseling for children under three years of age will be specified in the Course of Study for kindergarten.

b. Nursing school education for the mentally retarded will establish an elective subject area of "Foreign Language" at lower and upper secondary departments in order for students to deepen their understanding of international affairs. The teaching contents will be chosen to help students get familiar with and express themselves in the target language and have more interest in foreign countries. The new subject area "Information Study" at upper secondary department aims at helping students develop basic ability and mind to choose, process and send information by using computers. Students will be helped to acquire basic skills in using equipment and software in the class.

c. Nursing and rehabilitation activities are given depending upon each individual child's condition with the aim of helping children to be independent. Thus, nursing and rehabilitation activities will be renamed "Activities for Independence" in order to clarify the significance. Its objective and content will be reviewed in order to give instruction appropriately and effectively in response to the diversification of the nature of disabilities of children.

**V. Matters related to national curriculum standards reform**

*In order to attain the purpose of the comprehensive five-day school week and to help children cultivate the "zest for living", all of the guardians, members of the community and persons concerned must understand the purpose of this reform and play their own parts.*

**1. Textbooks and supplements**

a. It is important to write and compile textbooks, which properly reflect the purpose of the national curriculum standards reform (i.e. *deliberate selection of educational content and cultivation of the ability to learn how to learn and to solve problems*).

b. For moral education, not only providing reading materials, but also developing and using different types of teaching materials will be planned. Such efforts will provide variety in class activities to learn moral value, meaning of life and so forth.

**2. Teaching methods**

a. Improvement of teaching methods is required to provide individualized instruction which pays much attention to each child's interest, understanding of class content and the degree of achievement.

b. It is recommended to adopt such cooperative teaching strategy as the teaching by the united efforts of teachers of different specialties and the team teaching. Teaching by special part-time lectures will be more positively adopted. It is necessary to secure teaching personnel for information education and have nurse teachers and nutritionists cooperatively participate in the classes related to physical health and nutrition.

c. It is planned to build or improve educational aids (e.g. computer), information communication networks, information equipment and books in school library, audio-visual aids, educational facilities and equipment outside of school and the like.

**3. Grading method of academic achievement**

a. Improvement of grading method should contribute to the development of children’s motivation to learn and ability to think, judge and express oneself. The emphasis should be on the process of learning. Careful consideration needs to be given to the criteria of grading, for example, positive appreciation of children’s good points and progress.

b. The cumulative record will employ different grading methods suitable to the stage of school, the age (grade) of children and unique characteristics of the subject. In addition, individual schools and boards of education should make efforts to design evaluation methods.

**4. Selection of applicants for schools of upper level (universities, upper secondary schools and others)**

a. *Selection of applicants must be improved from the standpoint of helping children cultivate the “zest for living” and develop their individuality in order to make this curriculum standards reform effective.* Therefore, the selection method should be diversified and the criteria should be of variety. Specifically, for example, when an applicant's score is beyond the specified level, he/she will be examined by referring to other data. Some other examples include *essay, interview, and tests of one's practical skills, and appreciation of various activities both inside and outside of school.* Students' achievement on elective subjects at lower secondary school will not be evaluated at entrance examination for upper secondary school.

b. *Achievement tests should not measure children's ability by their fragmentary knowledge* but finding out whether they have ability to think and express themselves. Listening comprehension tests in foreign languages should be more widely adopted.

**5. Teachers**

a. It is necessary to place great value on the development of children's ability to learn and think independently, to select educational content carefully, and to make efforts to improve educational activities. *To promote these successfully, teachers need to improve their teaching skills in their specialized fields as a teaching professional and obtain broad outlook on the whole curriculum.* This requires further improvement on teacher training, appointment and in-service training.

b. The distribution of teachers needs to be considered in order for individual schools to smoothly take the following measures: formation of a distinctive curriculum including expansion of the elective system, improvement of teaching methods and systems such as adopting team teaching, and implementation of various learning activities in the "Period for Integrated Study".

**6. School management**

a. *Every school must demonstrate its distinctive features by forming and implementing curriculum unique to the school.* Thus, it is indispensable that the principal exercises his/her leadership and runs the school together with all other teachers in one united body. Considering the purpose of making the curriculum standards flexible, the boards of education should respect schools' independence and help them effectively.

b. *Schools should interchange information and ideas with each other, review curricula, events and meetings frequently, and encourage families and communities to recognize and fill their roles.*

c. Some schools neglect the national curriculum standards. Taking the opportunity of this reform, every school is requested to fully understand its purpose and take appropriate measures to attain the purpose.

d. Private schools will be requested to adopt the comprehensive five-day school week system in concert with national/public schools.

**7. Education in concert with families and communities**

a. To facilitate the open-school movement, the principal and all other teachers must recognize their responsibility and inform families and communities of the school's educational principles, activities and the state of children in order to have their understanding and cooperation.

Local facilities and environment will be positively used for school activities. Schools should actively offer their facilities for public use everyday including holidays and provide learning opportunities for adults and children in communities.

b. *Families and communities should provide children with a variety of opportunities during such long school recess as summer vacation. Taking advantage of these opportunities, children can participate in various activities including hands-on learning activities in daily life, in social life (e.g. volunteer activities) and in the environment as well as cultural activities and sports activities.*