

## Investigation and Research of Absenteeism in the Sumiyoshi Ward Investigative Report (March 31, 2017)

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### Abstract

Absenteeism can not be solved by school effort alone especially if it is rooted in family problems such as poverty, abuse, neglect, parent's mental health etc.. It is easy to say teachers need cooperation with those who are concerned in communities but, in reality, teachers tend to be alone in solving absenteeism. This paper has identified the obstacles and barriers which block communication and cooperation between teachers and would be supporters and has suggested possible solutions, based on case studies of junior high schools in Sumiyoshi Ward in Osaka City.

### I. Purpose of this report

This report aims to identify the fundamental viewpoints and the establishment of a working environment for the Sumiyoshi Ward to work on absenteeism<sup>2</sup> in junior high schools in Sumiyoshi Ward, based on the 'field study of the status quo of absenteeism and countermeasures of absenteeism in the Sumiyoshi Ward' in '4. Outsourcing content' in the manual of 'Investigation and research of Absenteeism in the Sumiyoshi Ward (Absenteeism Countermeasure Group) outsourcing.' Following the description in the manual on absenteeism, absenteeism in this report means the absenteeism in junior high schools in the Sumiyoshi Ward and that excludes the absenteeism in primary schools and the absenteeism outside of the Sumiyoshi Ward.

### II. Research Methods

Data is compiled mainly by the interview. The research was undertaken by three university professors and nine graduate students, making a total of 12 people. This report has been made through a number of research meetings following the interview. Interview, was undertaken from August 2016 to February 2017. Interview date, subject, number of researchers and time used are shown in table 1. There were 30 people (a total of 44 listening sessions) and a total time of 1,885 minutes (around 31 hours).

The process for interview was as follows. First, to find the root of the problem, preliminary research was conducted to the chief commissioned child welfare volunteer, the Sumiyoshi Ward child health and welfare advisory center, Y Junior High School, W Junior High School and the Board of Education School Social Worker Group manager. At the next stage, to narrow down the research target, details of actual cases at the W Junior High School

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2. MEXT (the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology) uses 'non-attendance' as an official English term, however, this paper calls it 'absenteeism' in order to facilitate mutual discussion between Germany and Japan.

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was administered through interview with consideration of protecting personal information. A number of teachers gathered and brainstormed what they could remember about individual cases at the W Junior High School. At the research meeting, information was gathered and recorded in chronological order, this included information about each case, the students, teacher countermeasures, correspondence and information sharing with external organizations and so on. This data was then taken to W Junior High School and reviewed to confirm its validity, additional information was then supplemented if needed.

Next, having actual cases from W Junior High School in mind, the interview was conducted with the organizations that are likely to cooperate with schools on how they are working together.

**Table 1: Interview Record**

Research Date	Interview Subject	No. of Researchers	Time Used (mins)
August 8	Chief Commissioned Child Welfare Volunteer	10	90
August 8	Sumiyoshi Ward Child Health & Welfare Advisory Center (Acting Manager)	10	30
August 16	Y Junior High School (Principal, Student Guidance Director)	7	90
August 22	Osaka City Board of Education Bureau Guidance Department, Junior High School Education Guidance Group (Guidance Director, School Social Worker Manager)	3	45
August 23	W Junior High School (Principal, Student Guidance Director, Guidance Counsellor, School Nurse)	6	105
September 2	Sumiyoshi Ward Vice Mayor, Department of Education & Culture Acting Head, Department of Health & Welfare Section Head (Child & Youth Growth Support Head), Children's Health Supervising Director	5	90
October 6	Z Junior High School (Student Guidance Teacher)	3	45
October 7	W Junior High School (Guidance Counsellor)	3	105
October 11	Z Junior High School Social Worker	3	60
October 17	Y Junior High School (Principal, Student Guidance Director)	4	75
October 27	W Junior High School (Head Teacher, Student Guidance Director, 2nd Grade Dean)	6	75
November 4	W Junior High School (Guidance Counsellor)	2	75
November 9	Y Junior High School (Student Guidance Director)	2	60
November 10	Z Junior High School (Student Guidance Director, Student Guidance Manager)	2	60
November 14	Osaka City Board of Education Bureau Guidance Department, Junior High School Education Guidance Group (Guidance Director)	1	60
November 16	Z Junior High School Social Worker	1	30
November 16	Y Junior High School (Human Rights Education Manager)	2	75
November 29	W Junior High School (Guidance Counsellor)	1	120
December 1	Osaka City Board of Education Bureau Guidance Department, Junior High School Education Guidance Group (Guidance Director/School Social Worker Manager)	1	60
December 5	Y Junior High School (Student Guidance Counsellor)	1	40
December 7	X Junior High School (Student Guidance Counsellor)	1	75
January 6	W Junior High School (Head Teacher, Student Guidance Counsellor)	5	75
January 13	Child Consultation Centre (Education Consultation Acting Head)	5	75
January 31	Sumiyoshi Ward Child Health & Welfare Advisory Center (Acting Manager, Mental Health Counsellor, Home Support Counsellor)	4	60
February 3	Osaka City South Child Healthcare Centre (Section Manager)	3	90
February 6	Sumiyoshi Police Station Community Safety Section (Section Chief, Acting Section Chief, Youth Subsection Chief)	4	60
February 8	Chief Commissioned Child Welfare Volunteer	3	60
	Total 44 listening sessions	98	1885 Around 31 hours

Again, along with these cases, interview was undertaken with W Junior High School, Y Junior High School, Z Junior High School teachers and school staff who are handling students with absenteeism. At W Junior High School there were 15 cases and there were several cases at Y Junior High School and Z Junior High School that were dealt with.

Interview was often conducted more than once as to get different viewpoints and for the validation of the discussion points broached in the research meeting that was conducted after the first interview. Further interview was conducted through the process of making this report.

### III. Research Framework

The school is the first to detect students who tend to be absent. Consequently, many cases of managing absenteeism are performed within the school. However, this report depending on outsourcing specifications aims to 'specify needed viewpoints and general improvements for the Sumiyoshi Ward based on findings.' Hence, from the viewpoint of what it should work on, suggestions for improvements for absenteeism in junior high schools within the Sumiyoshi Ward is examined below.

Through listening research, it became clear that the co-operation between schools and institutions and how the Sumiyoshi Ward collaborates has a significant influence on the awareness for parents of absentees. This report defines three types of parent awareness states.

Type I: Parent awareness is high, and the parents and the school are working together to find a solution.

Parents know that their child's absenteeism is a problem and are cooperating with the school and teachers to find a solution. Type I is the ones targeted by 'The State of Countermeasures for Absenteeism' (Department of Primary Education, MEXT, 255, 16 May 2003, notice for each prefectures designated Board of Education superintendent, each prefectural governor, president of each national university with an attached school, etc.) and 'Final Report on Support for Students with Absenteeism – furthering continuous and systematic support for dealing with the various issues of each individual' (July, 2016) by MEXT's 'Meeting of Collaborative Researchers on School Absenteeism'.

As stated in the 'Final Report on Support for Student with Absentees – furthering continuous and systematic support for dealing with the various issues of each individual' the problems with absenteeism itself is diverse. Moreover, from the standpoint of support it should be 'the support goals for absentees are to give social support for student futures to be mentally and economically independent and to have a rich and fulfilling life.' This means it is important that the, 'the support of absentees is not just to get students to attend school but for students to have initiative and to be independent in society.'

Parent interest is high and if the parents and the school are working together, parents are more willing to agree with the school's suggestions and the sharing of information with related organizations is comparably easy. The 'Final Report on Support for Student with Absentees – furthering continuous and systematic support for dealing with the various issues of each individual' already has detailed analysis and suggestions, therefore there is no need to go in to further detail.

What needs to be examined further through interview in the Sumiyoshi Ward is Type II and Type III absenteeism awareness.

Type II: Parent interest in their child's education and growth is low.

Parents of this type have a low awareness of the need for their child to attend school. They also do not consider providing alternative education. A parent of this type does not respond to home visits. Parents often do not agree to the involvement of other organizations. Type II absenteeism have a high chance of being overlooked and separated from social networks as stated in the 'Sumiyoshi Ward Child Education Meeting Document.' (March 2016)

Type III: Parent interest in their child's education is high however there is conflict between the school and parents.

In the case of Type II there is a possibility that the parents are unhappy with the school, however the difference between Type II and Type III is the level of interest in their child's education.

In the interview, we found that there are many distinct cases of Type II absenteeism, therefore we primarily examined this type of absenteeism. After focusing mainly on Type II, Type III absenteeism is touched upon.

### IV. Examination of Issues

This report, based on interview results will discuss and clarify the problems with absenteeism, then make suggestions on how to overcome these problems.

### **Issue 1: Individuals with a lack of social network links are often overlooked**

It was found that there are quite a few cases where there was a lack of understanding from parents that school attendance is compulsory as well as cases of child neglect and domestic violence as a background to Type II absenteeism. It is not rare that this is exacerbated by parents with mental and physical health or with poverty. Child neglect, domestic violence, mental and physical health and poverty should be first dealt with by the ward office.

On the other hand, it was found that it is difficult to provide these public services when parents are not interested in using them. This is where people who are not connected with public services are likely to be overlooked.

Under certain conditions even without the parents' consent, ward officials and child consultation center workers can intervene in such cases as child abuse to protect the child. In fact, it was found that there were cases where reporting of absenteeism from school caused the case to become a topic for the local association for countermeasures for child protection and this led to solving the issue. This is a case where the school focused on the development of absenteeism and provided the information to the services at the ward office. This was an effective solution to find individuals with problems who are not connected to the network of council services.

#### **Suggestions for Issue 1**

Schools are the first to perceive the risk of a student being absent or becoming an absentee. Furthermore, schools are the first to perceive that there could be an element of background family issues related to the absenteeism. The first step could be for schools to provide information to the ward office on students who are absent or at risk of becoming an absentee as well as providing information that there could be a family background issue. However, we found in practice that it is very difficult to provide such information. The details regarding this issue will be discussed below from issue 2 to issue 11.

### **Issue 2: The lack of sharing accumulated information from schools with the ward office and related services**

Regardless of whether it is Type I, Type II or Type III absenteeism, teachers visit the student's homes daily when a student becomes an absentee. The teacher tries to communicate with the student, however they often do not get to see the student when they visit. Nevertheless, the teacher persists and visits the home daily numerous times. Simultaneously the teacher tries to communicate with the parents and ask for cooperation. It is in this process that the teacher recognizes that some absent students are Type II.

A teacher rarely has information on what kind of social services the family is getting from the ward office when they begin their home visits. Through observation and communication with the parents and students the teacher can predict the actual state of the family. There are a number of parents who do not wish to meet with the teacher even when they are requested to. It is common that through numerous attempts of a teacher trying to meet with the parents that they are finally able to gain trust. This is the point where they realize there are some issues within the family or with the parents.

This is where the actual work begins. Teachers do not have the professional knowledge to solve the problems that lie behind absenteeism even if they are aware of what the issues are. A teacher's job is to educate students and they are not in a position to solve problems that parents may have. Teachers end up holding on to the problems not knowing what to do with them. In time they realize the necessity of the support from the welfare related organizations such as the ward office. When they ask for help, this action can cause more problems when the ward office steps in. This in turn causes parents to lose trust in the teacher due to the leak of information. This is when the relationship that the teacher has worked on gaining over a long period of time collapses. The teacher loses the relationship and an effective way of dealing with the absentee, this in turn affects the student.

Presently the privacy law has made it impossible for teachers and related workers to exchange and share personal information about the absenteeism and family issues. This has resulted in a situation where teachers end up holding on to the issues that parents have without knowing what to do with them.

#### **Suggestions for Issue 2**

As individual privacy is protected by law a working relationship is disallowed between schools and other organizations from the beginning if they could not share information about absenteeism. This does not lead to solving

the issues surrounding the absenteeism. There needs to be a method to collect information and share this so schools and other organizations can collaborate as well as comply with the law. Details regarding this is discussed below.

### **Issue 3: The assumption that information cannot be shared because of the Osaka City Personal Information Protection Act**

Especially in the case of Type II absentees, the school needs to collaborate with related organizations to provide support. To be able to do this it is important to be able to share information. However, due to the obligation to keep personal information confidential, it was made clear that currently, related organizations cannot be provided with the necessary information to do this.

The handling of personal information is stipulated in the Osaka City Personal Information Protection Act. It is defined in article 2.

1. Implementing organization  
Mayor, President of Osaka City Assembly, Education Board, Election Management Committee, Personnel Committee, Inspection Committee, Fixed Assets Evaluation Screening Committee, This City's Public Enterprise Manager and Fire Department Chief as well as Local Independent Administrative Agency (as defined in the Local Independent Administrative Agency Act, Act no. 118 of 2003, article 2 item 1, Local Independent Administrative Law. Hereinafter the same.)
2. Personal Information  
The term "personal information" as used in this Act shall mean information about a living individual which can identify the specific individual by name, date of birth or other description contained in such information including information as will allow easy reference to other information and will thereby enable the identification of the specific individual.
3. Retained Personal Information  
This shall mean the personal information that was made or gained by staff of implementing organizations (this includes the board members of local independent administrative agencies that this city has established, hereinafter the same) and is used by the staff of this implementing organization systematically for such aim this implementing organization is keeping it for.  
(Below has been summarized by the author)

It is stated in article 6, clause 1

The implementing organizations must collect personal information in an appropriate and fair manner and with the specific aim of administration work that deals with the personal information and within the range of necessity to achieve the clarified aim of administration when they attempt to collect personal information.

Also stated in article 6, clause 3

3. An implementing organization must collect privacy information from the actual individual. However, with these exceptions:

1. As required by law
2. With the individual consent
3. (Removed by author)
4. Cases in which the handling of personal information is necessary for the protection of the life, body, or property of an individual and in which it is difficult to obtain the consent of the person and/or an urgent necessity.
- 5-7. (Removed by author)

Again, in the same article, clause 10

The implementing organization must not use the privacy information beyond the scope necessary for the achievement

of the purpose of utilization specified or can not provide the retained personal information to a third party apart from this implementing organization except in the following cases:

1. As required by law
2. With the individual consent or provided to the individual
3. Already public information
4. Cases in which the handling of personal information is necessary for the protection of the life, body, or property of an individual and in which it is difficult to obtain the consent of the person and/or an urgent necessity.
5. Cases in which the handling of personal information is necessary for cooperating with a state organ, a local government, or an individual or a business operator entrusted by either of the former two in executing the affairs prescribed by laws and regulations and in which obtaining the consent of the person is likely to impede the execution of the affairs concerned

Not being able to provide the information a school holds to the ward office is a wall against finding a solution for absenteeism. Below will describe how the mayoral office handles personal information and how the personal information is handled between the mayoral office and the Board of Education.

Based on article 6, clause 10, even within the different sections of the mayoral office it is against the law to share personal information. Furthermore, in the 3rd chapter, ‘basic knowledge for the protection of personal information for the workers of Osaka City,’ of the ‘Paperwork Manual (page 8)’ for public servants there is this explanation:

To hold personal information that goes over what is needed to achieve the administrative goal is not only a problem itself but also has the risk of being used in an incorrect manner.

Within the mayoral office, information cannot be shared with individual C that has different aim to individual B who both work in Section A. This comes under the ‘use for another purpose’ and is forbidden.

This shows that even within a mayoral office section, personal information sharing is illegal by law. However, in the same article clause 10, point 5 ‘for use only within the implementing organization or if it is beneficial for the individual and does not infringe on the individual rights’ means that information can be shared. Based on this point, also in the ‘Paperwork Manual’s’ ‘3rd chapter ‘basic knowledge for the protection of personal information for the workers of Osaka City’ has this explanation. (page 8)

Sharing of personal information is against the law, however if it can be established that the use of information held by other organizations is beneficial from the point of making the public services more effective, it may be possible to share the personal information.

If the case comes under the Protection Regulations article 10, clause 5, it is necessary to consult and make an application with the ‘Osaka City Council for Protection of Personal Information’ and take the correct actions.

Essentially, if correct actions and processes are undertaken and the Osaka City Council for Protection of Personal Information is consulted, it is possible for information to be shared between staff. The issue here is that the ‘Osaka City Council for Protection of Personal Information’ is not consulted and article 10, clause 5 is not applied to solve the issues on absenteeism and the background issues of absenteeism, therefore, information sharing remains forbidden.

Next, information sharing between schools and the ward office is examined. In the Osaka City Personal Information Protection Act, article 11 it is defined as below:

The implementing organization must make necessary limitations to the purpose of using the particular individual’s personal information or limitations on the method of using it and other necessary limitations when it is considered that



there is a need to provide the personal information externally.

Furthermore, in the ‘Paperwork Manual’ for city council workers, chapter 3, ‘basic knowledge for the protection of personal information for the workers of Osaka City’ has this explanation.

In the case of the Board of Education, the sharing of personal information retained by the Mayor is seen as a sharing of information with an external organization.

This is not defined clearly in the ‘Paperwork Manual’, however, from the above explanation it can be inferred that information sharing between schools and the ward office is seen as sharing with an ‘external organization.’

Therefore, with the current rules regarding information sharing within the mayoral office making it impossible for workers within the same organization to share information then it can be assumed that it cannot be possible for schools to share information with the ward office.

Ward offices and the Board of Education are included in the scope of the ‘Osaka City Personal Information Protection Act’ as found in article 11, clause 1. However, the mayoral office and Board of Education can both use article 10, clause 5, as written above. That is schools and the ward office are seen as ‘sharing externally,’ however, it is possible to share information if the ‘Osaka City Council for Protection of Personal Information’ is consulted and necessary steps undertaken as defined in article 10, clause 5. However, this must be referred to again that information sharing remains prohibited because the application of article 10, clause 5 for schools and ward office to solve issues is not consulted with the ‘Osaka City Council for Protection of Personal Information.’

If this situation is not dealt with, personal information sharing between schools and the ward offices and within the ward office will remain forbidden. Furthermore, if there is no information sharing there is no reason to work together on solving issues. This may cause individuals to miss out on the use of public services and the root of the student’s absenteeism may be left undealt with. This in turn causes the students issues to be become more problematic. School teachers are dedicated and try to solve issues on their own however this often does not work. This is discussed in issues 1 and 2 above.

### **Suggestions for Issue 3**

The Osaka City Personal Information Protection Act article 10, clause 5 is consulted to solve the issues with absenteeism and the background issues relating to absenteeism. It is recommended that this act is consulted to make it possible for mayoral office workers to share information with each other.

Similarly, it is recommended that the ‘Osaka City Council for Protection of Personal Information’ is consulted to make it possible for school teachers and mayoral office workers to share information with each other.

However, this will take a significant amount of time as it requires checking the compliance with the national ‘Act on the Protection of Personal Information,’ then identifying the issues in the background of absenteeism and in the development of absenteeism and the specific work needed in the related sections. Even if information sharing is granted within mayoral offices, sharing of information between several organizations may not be allowed.

If information sharing between several organizations is not granted, the previous ideas will have to be questioned again as absenteeism problems could solely be a school’s problem and therefore will have to be solved by the school alone. Below issue four will discuss this.

Furthermore, in the case where information sharing is forbidden between organizations not to mention the sections within organizations it is necessary to find a way to share personal information that leads to resolving absenteeism problems with compliance to the Osaka City Personal Information Protection Act. Especially until the report is prepared to the advisory board this needs to be done with close looking into the Osaka City Personal Information Protection Act. These problems are discussed below in issues five and six.

### **Issue 4: Absenteeism is seen exclusively as a school’s problem.**

The school is the first to see a potential absenteeism problem. They are the first notice a student’s absence, whether it is absenteeism as defined by MEXT or a tendency of being absent that has a possibility of leading to

absenteeism.

Schools are also expected to be the main organization to solve absenteeism. It is advocated for the school to work with other organizations in the 'Final Report on Support for Student with Absentees – furthering continuous and systematic support for dealing with the various issues of each individual' by MEXT. However, even when working with other organizations the main responsibility is with the school to solve the issue.

There is no section that deals with absenteeism in the ward office. There is a counter such as a child consultation center counter for the parents to consult with regarding their child's absenteeism. However, this is just a part of child fostering consultancy services.

The role of the ward office on absenteeism is limited in the aspect of compulsory school attendance. Parents are obligated to send their children to school. The ward office is assigned to support the process around students enrolling into schools when the age of schooling is reached. The role of the ward office stops there. For example, in the case of enrolment issues due to financial difficulty, there is a system for support, however, in the case of Osaka City this is under the Board of Education. It is the school principal who makes the judgement that parents have no justified reason for not making their child attend school. This is in the case when a student is absent for more than seven consecutive days (week days) and/or when school attendance is infrequent (School Education Act Enforcement Regulations, article 20). Furthermore, in cases where the school principal determines that there is no justified reason for the absence, the principal needs to report this to the city education board (School Education Act Enforcement Regulations, article 20). It is the education board who enforces school attendance by parents when it is deemed that parents are not fulfilling the duty of compulsory school attendance (School Education Act Enforcement Regulations, article 21) and through this system they are supposed to fine the parents 100,000 yen if demands of school attendance is ignored (School Education Act, article 144).

The ward office does not have a section that handles absenteeism and they do not deal with enforcing parents or supporting parents in compulsory school attendance. This has caused a situation where information about a absenteeism remains only within schools.

Based on the School Education Act Enforcement Regulations, article 20 and 21 and the School Education Act, article 144, not complying with compulsory school attendance can be avoided even in the case of Type II absenteeism. However, there are almost no cases in Japan where the parents have been fined based on this law. This is because of the difficulties in making a decision on whether the parents have a justified reason for non-attendance as defined in article 144 of the School Education Act.

From interview, it was found that often parents do not understand the meaning of compulsory school attendance and/or there is child neglect or domestic violence in the background of Type II absenteeism. Additionally, as is often in cases like this, this can be exacerbated because of the parent's mental health or financial situation. The consulting office to deal with these issues is the ward office, where there are specialists in those areas working on these issues. School teachers are not specialists in this area, they are not trained or given special knowledge during teacher training at university on this. As the system is designed for information privacy protection, teachers are not able to access information about what kind of support the individual's parents are getting from the ward office. Teachers are dealing with parents without specialist knowledge or basic personal information about the individuals.

In these circumstances it is impossible to judge whether parents are not enforcing school attendance for their children without a genuine reason as defined by law without the cooperation of specialists in the ward office. This has made a situation where teachers have no choice but to work with parents of Type II absenteeism without any strategy.

#### **Suggestions for Issue 4**

A suggestion is that the idea that schools are responsible for solving absenteeism with the help of the ward office needs to be revised to the ward office is responsible for solving absenteeism with the help of the school. This would mean a structure where the Sumiyoshi Ward Head is also the Education Vice Head and has the responsibility of guiding parents of junior high school students in the responsibility of compulsory school attendance. If this is the case, until a student attends school they will be the responsibility of the ward office. This will allow schools to focus on education for students who attend school. For schools it does not matter who a student is, they have a responsibility



ity to make an environment where it is easy for a student to learn. Therefore, even if the ward office takes the main responsibility, it is important not to neglect the home visits and other measures taken by the school for absenteeism. Based on the idea that it becomes publicly acceptable that the ward office has the most responsibility, it would be a necessary measure for the ward office to collect and hold personal information regarding absenteeism.

In this system, it would be essential for a junior high school to inform the ward office of any information about absenteeism or at risk of absenteeism students. It does not matter whether the student is Type I, Type II or Type III. It will also make it an obligation of the ward office to conduct home visits, they can request that the teacher goes with them if necessary. With regards to Type II absenteeism, the ward office based on this information can give directions within the related sections of the ward office. With regards to Type I and Type III absenteeism, the ward office worker responsible can create individual plans to deal with absenteeism and schools and relevant organizations can provide support.

This idea could solve many of the problems related to absenteeism, on the other hand, to make this a reality it will become necessary for many improvements, in certain cases a revision of regulations and drastic organizational reforms. It could take much time to make this a reality. This could be more difficult than the suggestions for issue 3. The ideal is to head in this this direction and work on reforms that are possible in stages. Below, regarding the problems associated with the alternative plan is presented and suggested solutions are given.

### **Issue 5: Osaka City Personal Information Protection Act, Chapter 6, Paragraph 3, (2) 'in case of agreement from the individual' is not used.**

In the Osaka City Personal Information Protection Act, article 6, clause 3 point 2, and in clause 10, point 2, it states that the information known by schools can be shared with the ward office with parental consent. If there is parental consent, the absenteeism can be classed as Type I. This report mainly discusses Type II absenteeism which means parents have little interest in their child's school education or growth. In this case, teachers are struggling to gain parent cooperation and this issue cannot be solved only by urging teachers to get parental consent. In most cases teachers have made a lot of effort in this direction.

#### **Suggestions for Issue 5**

It is ideal to use social workers or a chief commissioned child welfare volunteer to get consent from parents. This will be discussed below in issues 7 and 8.

### **Issue 6: Osaka City Personal Information Protection Act, Chapter 6 Paragraph 3, (4) To protect individual life, body or property, in case of emergency and without any other choice' is not used.**

This indicates that schools can provide the information that they gained to a child consultation center and workers in the related section of the ward office when they must protect individual life, body or property, in case of emergency and without any other choice as stated in the Osaka City Personal Information Protection Act, article 6, clause 3 point 4 and in clause 10 point 4. In fact, in such cases as this, they must provide the information to the ward office rather than they may.

However, it became clear through interview that schools find it difficult to decide whether they should report or consult with external organizations. There is a tendency that the school waits until the situation becomes serious. They do not have enough knowledge on how they should consult.

#### **Suggestions for Issue 6**

Teachers can become aware of whether they should report or not and how to consult with related organizations by using social workers. This is discussed below in issue 7. Furthermore, regarding consultation is discussed below in issue 10.

### **Issue 7: There is not an environment where a school social worker can work effectively**

School social workers view the different aspects of absentees' backgrounds differently from teachers. They

have specialist knowledge and skills on the working relationship between schools and other organizations that they need for the support of absentees. For example, as referred to in issue 6, they have accurate knowledge about defining when ‘protecting individual life, body or property, in case of emergency and without any other choice’ can be used and at what point they should report to the child consultation center or even whether they should report or not and how they should consult with them. Furthermore, school social workers have specialist knowledge and skills on how to approach parents. For example, they have specialist knowledge about how to unearth the issues and what is in the parent’s background through showing empathy with them and through advising them about the public services that they need. On such aspects, teachers can ask school social workers for support, they can also learn about the specialist knowledge they need from them through ways as on the job training.

Osaka city has school social workers stationed in certain schools throughout the city, they also help the nearby schools that do not have a school social worker. Therefore, through interview it became clear the evaluation of the effectiveness of school social workers by teachers is different between schools that have a school social worker and schools that need to request for one to visit.

In 2016, there are eight school social workers in junior high schools in Osaka city, therefore almost all junior high schools must request for a school social worker to visit their school.

They need to apply for a school social worker to visit the school and this creates extra work. In addition to this, there are teachers who stated that it is better to work on the issue themselves rather than having a school social worker visit because they could come only once or a few times. Furthermore, they do not visit homes and when teachers explain the background of a student they give commonplace advice.

On the other hand, positive feedback was given from the schools that the social worker belongs to. This feedback was due to them being able to understand students better, they are helpful because they identify issues in the student’s family background accurately and share that information with teachers. They assisted in cases where the abuse needed to be reported when a teacher did not see the need to report because of the lack of specialist knowledge. They gave advice on how to contact related organizations or how to advise parents when they use related organizations. School social workers are evaluated highly in the schools they belong to.

In schools that have a school social worker, the school social worker has desk space in the teacher’s room where they can observe teachers and students on a daily basis. Therefore, their advice can be appropriate and accurate. In the long-term cases, it is also natural to support the parents directly by visiting homes with the teacher. Furthermore, in the case of an emergency they can respond more quickly.

### **Suggestions for Issue 7**

They need to increase the number of school social workers.

If the number of school social workers cannot be increased quickly within the budget, school social workers can employ a system where they regularly visit schools, they can extend the time spent at one school to the longest possible so that they can get enough knowledge about the school’s student guidance practices and based on each school’s needs provide support. To achieve this there needs to be an environment for the school social worker to work in at the school.

Currently there is an extreme shortage of school social workers, if we take an equal approach, there is only a very short time for them to stay at one school. This would lead to a situation in which teachers cannot see the merit of introducing them. Thus, the negative side of having school social workers is focused on and the need for these workers might seem not necessary. There could be a way of narrowing down the number of schools where social workers are heavily involved with until the number increases. In the transition period of having social workers at all schools, a model needs to be constructed on how teachers should work with them. Through the accumulation of cases using school social workers, teachers can see the effectiveness of the school social worker system.

Schools should not expect that the introduction of a school social worker an achievement for direct support, there also needs to be indirect support such as a change in the school culture of all teachers. It will take more than a year to observe such changes.

### **Issue 8: There is not an environment where a chief commissioned child welfare volunteer can work effectively as local support.**

Chief commissioned child welfare volunteers are obligated to stay confidential by law. They are aware and familiar with the processes and systems at the welfare section of the ward office. They are extremely high in affinity with schools and children. However, we found that there were teachers who did not know they existed. Usually, the principal, head teacher and school guidance director are the ones who contact organizations outside of the school. On the other hand, it is teachers who go out and visit homes. Because of the structure where teachers do not contact outside organizations it is difficult for a teacher to be aware of the existence of a chief commissioned child welfare volunteer.

#### **Suggestions for Issue 8**

The teachers other than only management need to be acquainted with the chief commissioned child welfare volunteer in their region. Chief commissioned child welfare volunteers should routinely visit schools. It is important for teachers to become aware of the range of specialist knowledge that they have, such as knowledge of ward office systems and policies, the social networks available in the local area and the fact that they are obligated to be confidential by law.

It heavily depends on how the chief commissioned child welfare volunteer approaches absenteeism. If the suggestions for issue 4 are achieved, which is where the ward office has the responsibility and authority to enforce school attendance, or the suggestion for issue 3, which is applying the Osaka City Personal Information Protection Act, article 10 clause 5 (if the 'Osaka City Council for Protection of Personal Information' is consulted it may be possible for schools and the mayoral office as well as workers within this organization to share information with each other) is achieved, this makes it much more straightforward for chief commissioned child welfare volunteer to solve absenteeism, especially the family issues that are in the background.

Even if the suggestions above are not achieved there are still approaches that can be undertaken. It is possible for teachers to consult with a chief commissioned child welfare volunteer without disclosing any personal information about the absentee. For example, a teacher could ask for advice on which ward office counter they should suggest to parents to go to get advice from.

### **Issue 9: There are only a few teachers with enough knowledge and experience to give advice about the availability of services at the ward office and public services.**

Once usage of the school social worker and the chief commissioned child welfare volunteer becomes the norm, teachers can obtain support on how they can earn cooperation from parents as referred to in issue 6. The teachers themselves, learn the skill on how to approach parents and the process of working with school social workers and chief commissioned child welfare volunteers.

Below, it is assumed that there is a situation that teachers could not immediately get support from school social workers and a chief commissioned child welfare volunteer.

Teachers do not have enough specialist knowledge and experience to advise parents on how to obtain and use public services such as the ward office. A teacher's job is to educate students and they are not specially trained in welfare policies. Also, they are not specially trained to solve the various issues that adults have and the way to approach such adults. There is a lack of education and training on how to deal with adults in the teacher training curriculum at universities. Therefore, teachers need systematic support when they attempt to approach parents.

A few teachers assume that it is embarrassing to receive public services as they assume adults should be responsible for their own issues. This is due to the lack of knowledge of public services available. In other cases, they assume that consulting with the public office counter is only for special cases. Such assumptions inhibit teachers from providing correct advice about the public services available to parents.

#### **Suggestions for Issue 9**

The workers at the ward office are the ones most knowledgeable about the public services available. Ward office workers need to explain about the services available directly to school related individuals. This means setting up

training sessions or giving out pamphlets which clearly explain the systematic public services available and asking if there are any teachers who have questions or issues they need help with by constant visits to the schools.

This will increase the work load for both teachers and ward office workers in the short term. However, in the long term it will decrease the work load for teachers as they will be better at approaching parents and solving the issues of their students with the knowledge of available public services. Furthermore, it maximizes cost-effectiveness for public services if there is an appropriate approach that a school can take, and it helps with finding the people who have dropped out of the public service network.

When the ward office worker explains the systematic public services available, if needed they need to resolve misconceptions amongst teachers that it is not embarrassing, and public services are not only for special cases.

Through interview, it was discovered that there is an effective way to assist parents to receive public services. It is better to say why don't you go and talk to a person at the Ward Office counter' rather than 'I advise you to consult with the counter at the ward office.' Teachers need training on effective communication strategies to assist parents to receive public services.

### **Issue 10: There are only a few teachers who can effectively consult with related offices, councils or organizations.**

This report will discuss based on a situation where the support from the school social worker and the chief commissioned child welfare volunteer is not readily received.

In issue 7 it was discussed how it is difficult for teachers to decide whether to use 'to protect individual life, body or property, in case of emergency and without any other choice', and at what point consulting centers should be informed. Hesitation causes the issue to become more serious, and it is at the point where the school cannot handle the issue anymore that the child consultation center is contacted. Leaving an issue to where it has become serious causes a situation where rather than solving the problem it causes difficulties.

Therefore, it is necessary for schools to consult with the related organization on whether they should report or what they could do.

However, through interview it was found that some teachers have a mistrust of consulting. Teachers explained that when they consult they are only told 'let's wait and see' and this does not lead to a result, furthermore even if a trusted consultant is called upon they are often not available or reachable.

### **Suggestions for Issue 10**

When there is not a school social worker and a chief commissioned child welfare volunteer nearby, active consultation with related organizations who have specialist information is more effective to help solve the issue in a timely manner and it releases some of the work load from the teacher.

From the process of interview, it was found that teachers lack information about public services as detailed below.

Teachers have a mental block regarding that it is not easy to consult with other related organizations because of the obligation to keep personal information confidential. It is seen as normal practice for a civil servant that they could not share information that they have gained through their work externally. However, child consultation centers and the police are more thorough with their management of information. They have rich resources of specialist knowledge and experience to identify or separate what identifying information they can get from the school or what they cannot according to each case. Therefore, teachers should feel at ease and not hesitate to consult with these organizations. Furthermore, by describing a case in an abstract manner a teacher can get around the rigid necessity of complying with confidentiality.

Another misconception is that even if a teacher consults with an organization they are not given a solution. Likely, the teachers assume that consulting and gathering information are the same thing. When consulting, protective measures are taken as soon as possible if needed. However, a teacher is not a specialist, so they are unable to distinguish if these measures are needed or not. That decision should be made by a specialist. Because teachers lack the expertise to make these decisions they need to ask for advice, it does not matter if the consultation does not lead to protective measures, the important thing is, in cases where this is necessary that the consultant is informed.

Through doing this, correct measures can be undertaken if needed. Even in cases where it is not needed it can be still seen as an action to protect. Furthermore, it is important that even if protective measures are not taken it is recorded as it may be needed for future reference. If the situation gets worse, if there is a record of communication then more accurate measures can be undertaken. When teachers consult and are told to 'let's see what happens' they should ask for advice on what the school can do. Teachers are not specialists therefore it is acceptable for them to be in a position where they can ask for advice.

The same can be said for when consulting with the police. Before a situation becomes serious if the police are consulted it is possible to get support on what the school should do at that time and even if the situation worsens quick and appropriate actions can be taken.

The issue of when a child consultation center worker is contacted they are not often not in the office cannot be helped. The number of cases addressed at child welfare centers compared to the number of teachers is numerous. Furthermore, the consultants work is to literally consult therefore they work in a separate room and are often away from the telephone at their desk. Therefore, when teachers attempt to call they often cannot get hold of the consultant, so they begin to think it is a waste of time to call. We found the issue here was in the way that teachers make the calls. From the interview, it became apparent that if the teacher asked to leave a message explaining their reason for calling they could change the situation rather than just asking for the consultant by name. Child consultation center work content is divided into small groups. The case is assigned depending on the specialization of the consultant on the case. When a teacher tries to contact a consultant by name it may not be the right kind of specialist for the particular case. If a detailed message is left, time can be saved by having the correct consultant assigned to the case from the beginning.

### **Issue 11: There is no mediation process for Type III Absenteeism.**

In the case of Type III absenteeism, it is proposed that parents ask for advice from the child welfare office. When schools and parents are at a conflict, it seems that parents tend to consult with the Board of Education. However, because the Board of Education is in the position to manage schools it is hard for them to mend the relationship as a third party. Furthermore, the ward office functions as part of the Board of Education therefore they also cannot be a third party.

#### **Suggestions for Issue 11**

It is impossible for a public organization to be a third party when there is conflict, a mediator is required between parents and schools and these mainly should be local volunteers and NPO's. The mediator is expected to provide feedback to the school as to the current state of school and the child.

## **V. Conclusion**

In this report issues were pointed out and suggestions were provided around Type II absenteeism based on the interview in the Sumiyoshi Ward. Due to the barrier of confidentiality regarding personal information it has become clear that there is a difficulty in sharing information as the base of the working relationship of schools and related organizations. Without a working relationship with external organizations, schools will be worn out. This makes not only keeping a good academic standard for their students but also solving the phenomena of absenteeism difficult. However, from interview it became clear it is possible to turn the situation around by changing the perception of who takes responsibility and using the suggestions from this report and continually doing this by taking small steps. It is important to explore what can be done rather than giving up because there is a barrier. This is for the students in front of them and for the people who have fallen out of the public social service network.

In this report, we were unable to refer to the cooperation of local people who are not public office workers or chief commissioned child welfare volunteers as Type II absenteeism was mainly discussed. It is impossible to disclose information on absenteeism from the school to local people because of the personal information protection act. However, it is possible for local people to provide information on absenteeism and that information could lead to solve absenteeism issues at schools and ward offices. It was confirmed that the teachers at schools are welcoming

this. As a countermeasure for Type I absenteeism there is local cooperation in the way of creating places for students to come together, however, this is not referred to in this report. It is necessary to start working together with organizations that have already started this practice.