

“Happiness” in school: Snapshots from Akita

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Source: Leaflet of Higashi Naruse Village

1. Background: Akita Prefecture

Background of Akita (1)



■ Location: 450km North to Tokyo

■ Population: 1,040,764

* 1/13 of Tokyo (13,161,751)¹

* 1/6 of Bangkok (5,683,686)²

■ Top ranking in the National Achievement Examination since 2007

Background of Akita (2)

* Rich in nature and culture



Shirakami-Sanchi World Heritage Property*
(the largest remaining virgin beech forest in East Asia)



Unique local culture

Namahage, a demon of folklore
Kamakura, snow dome, in winter
Kanto, traditional lantern in summer

Background of Akita (3)

* Tokyo Tech visited Akita schools since 2012



2.Schools in Akita

Akita Schools Visited

Location	Name of the School	No. of Students	Average No. of students in class
Yuzawa City	Yuzawa Nishi primary school	508	22-31
	Yamada junior high school	82	25-29
	Yuzawa Higashi primary school	500	30-34
	Yuzawa Kita junior high school	332	25-29
	Komagata primary school	101	13-25
	Inakawa junior high school	236	24-27
Ugo Town	Ugo junior high school	247	27-34
Higashi Naruse Village	Higashi Naruse primary school	114	13-34
	Higashi Naruse junior high school	67	21-25

Examples of the school visions

“Be a child with dreams and self-motivation, let’s make a happy school together”

(Yuzawa Higashi Primary School)



“To raise students who learn proactively , have compassion, and live a full life”

(Higashi Naruse Junior High School)

“To raise students who have compassion , an indomitable spirit, and creativity”

(Yuzawa Kita Junior High School)



“Filled with dreams, being bright and having compassion and an indomitable spirit”

(Higashi Naruse Primary School)



3. Snapshots: how the Akita schools promote the “Happy Schools” concept

Initial Happy Schools Criteria

What makes a Happy School?

People 	Process 	Place 
Friendship with other students (of the same or across grades)	Teamwork learning (help and support from other students)	Outdoor playing and green spaces
Good relationship between students and teachers	Learning content is useful for daily life	Creative visual displays
All students of different backgrounds feel included	Reasonable workload (homework and exams)	A warm and friendly learning environment
Helping students with special needs	Freedom to express opinion in school and in the classroom	Comfortable for students with different needs and backgrounds
Support from local community	Interesting and engaging learning activities 	Good nutrition
Parental encouragement	Frequent feedback from teachers	School is safe and free from bullying, stress and competition
School Leadership 	Extra-curricular activities	
	Learning outside the classroom	



Friendship with other students

- * Activities in a groups of different grades and schools



Source: Leaflet of Higashi Naruse Village



Source: Higashi Naruse Village Facebook

Students of Primary School and Junior High School in Higashi Naruse Village promote hometown appreciation project together

“We try to provide students with the opportunity to develop bonds with students of different classes and grades through this activity” (Mr. Tsurukai, Head of Board of Education, Higashi Naruse Village)



Support from local Community

- * School has established strong bond with community



Source: <http://www.yutopia.or.jp/~higa-es/gakkiz.html>

Parent-Child joint learning activities
(Yuzawa Higashi Primary school)



Source:
http://es.higashinaruse.com/04_event/07_event.html

Source: Leaflet of Higashi Naruse Village

Local volunteers provide sports lessons
(Higashi Naruse Primary School)

“I believe that the school should be an open place for everybody. So, our school is always open to the community members. ” (Mr. Suzuki, School principal of Yuzawa Higashi Primary School)



Teamwork learning

- * Lessons are carefully designed to achieve a balanced combination of individual learning and learning in a group





Freedom to express opinion

- * Everyone has the opportunity to express one's opinion



- * Everyone has a role to play in the classroom





Frequent feedback from teachers

- * Teachers give positive and careful feedback to students





Creative visual displays

- * Attractive display of learning materials to stimulate students' interest and motivation





A warm and friendly learning environment

- * The classroom is an open place for everyone



Source: <http://www.yutopia.or.jp/~higa-es/gyouji.h>

Successful factors of happy schools



From teachers' perspective

1. School is the place where teachers are open to each other in building good relationships
2. School is the place where teachers feel that teaching is challenging but rewarding
3. School is the place where distance between teachers and student is small



From students' perspective

1. School is the place where students can feel the joy of learning
2. School is the place where each student is recognized and appreciated
3. School is the place where students have great friends



The four elements of “happiness”

- * In Yuzawa Higashi Primary School, “happiness” is defined in four elements:



➡ The four elements are incorporated into the daily educational activities in the Akita schools

Quote from Akita

“Only the privileged people are allowed to be engaged in children. The profession of such a privilege is a teacher.”

(Mr. Shuji Suzuki, School principal of Yuzawa Higashi Primary School)





(Higashi Naruse Primary School)

Thank you very much!



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The ideas and opinions expressed in this presentation are of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of schools in Akita.