

Lower school age and offer free preschool, education panel says

- 1) Japan should offer free education for children as young as 3 years old and reduce the age at which all children must start school, from 6 to 5, a government panel on education reform advised Thursday.
- 2) It recommended that free preschool education be **rolled out** gradually, with the ultimate aim of **granting** access to all children aged 3 to 5.
- 3) The recommendations were drafted by a team headed by Waseda University President Kaoru Kamata, who handed the report to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at his office.
- 4) "The proposals would transform our country's educational system, which is 70 years old and has been in place since the war," Education Minister Hakubun Shimomura quoted the prime minister as saying.
- 5) "The education ministry aims to realize free education at preschools by 2020," Shimomura said.
- 6) The ministry will talk to relevant parties about how to fund the expansion, estimated to cost ¥790 billion, he said.
- 7) Other proposals by the 15-member panel include creating a new category of school. This would **merge** the functions of elementary and junior high school, and offer a full nine years of **uninterrupted** schooling at one institution.
- 8) Currently, children usually spend six years at elementary school and three years at junior high school. Municipalities that want to create nine-year schools have to apply for special permission.
- 9) The change would give municipalities more flexibility to meet local demands. It would also reduce the stress on students forced to change schools and adjust to new surroundings, classmates and staff.
- 10) Shimomura said he aims to submit bills on the matter to the regular Diet session next year, following discussions by the Central Council for Education, the main advisory panel to the minister.
- 11) The panel also urged reform of the teaching certificate system so that teachers can provide instruction in multiple categories of schools, such as elementary and junior high schools. 【Jul 4, 2014／Japan Times】

roll out : (新製品等を)公開する grant : 許可する、認める merge : 合併する uninterrupted : 途切れない、一体の

★Ice breaker for active discussion★

1. Please briefly explain the current education system in Japan.
2. Do you think it is timely to change the education system after 70 years of education uniformity? Why or why not?
3. What do you think is the importance of pre-school education? What is your opinion about lowering the starting age of compulsory education?
4. If you could make a suggestion to the Prime Minister, what do you think is the ideal education system that fits Japan?
5. Elementary school teachers teach all subjects. Do you think it is timely to revise the system wherein teachers will teach the subject that they are specialized in?
6. Are you familiar with other country's education system? Could you share some information?
7. Make sentences using the following words: rolled out, ultimate, grant, draft, merge, quote, multiple, certificate and uninterrupted.

政府の教育再生実行会議は、2013 年に安倍首相の私的諮問機関として官邸に設置され、22 回にわたって開催されさまざまな提言を行っている。2014 年 6 月 11 日の会議で、学制改革をめぐる提言の素案が議論され、幼児教育の段階的無償化や小中一貫校の制度化、職業教育を行う高等教育機関の新設などについて提言する方向で合意した。