

## What are the 2020 educational and entrance-exam reforms?

### The aims of the reforms in education and entrance exams

As world society goes through swift changes such as globalization and the evolution of AI, Japanese society is grappling with the issue of how to achieve sustainable growth in the face of a declining birthrate and an aging population. In this societal situation, children in the future will need to draw on the knowledge and skills they have

acquired so they can think on their own, express themselves, make judgments, and be of service to society. The educational and entrance-exam reforms for 2020 aim to boost the talents and abilities of children living in the 21st century so that they can take an active part in the society of the future.

### Time schedule for educational and entrance-exam reforms

	FY2018	>	FY2019	>	FY2020	>	FY2021–
<b>Elementary/junior high domain</b>			▶ New elementary/junior high curriculum will commence		▶ New elementary school curriculum to include English as a new subject		▶ New junior high curriculum
<b>Senior high school domain</b>			▶ Incoming freshmen will be the first to take reformed college entrance exams		▶ Utilization of external English tests		▶ Basic Assessment of Learning goes into use
<b>University domain</b>			▶ Mandatory disclosure of the “three policies” (2017–)		▶ Introduction of the Common Test for University Admissions		

### Key changes: Courses of Study and university entrance-exam system

The educational and entrance-exam reforms embody two main, specific changes. The first consists of revisions to the Courses of Study, i.e., to the standards for educational curricula. The revisions clarify what the learning should enable the children to do, and emphasize the use of active learning—which is subjective, interactive, and deep—to help children acquire the talents and abilities specified in the Courses of Study. Science and mathematics education will feature more investigations, experiments, etc., and will have a large number of language activities in which the students discuss things and summarize their thoughts in groups. And, to improve students’ abilities to utilize information, there will also be learning that trains students in programming-like thinking. The revisions also aim to enhance English education. To be specific, in elementary school, activities that make use of English will become compulsory starting in the middle grades, and English will begin to be taught as a regular subject in the higher grades.

Alongside these reforms to what is taught and how it is taught there will come the second main change, which regards the university entrance-exam system. Here, the most

significant change will be the replacement of the National Center Test for University Admissions with the Common Test for University Admissions. In the tests for Japanese Language and for Mathematics, in addition to the traditional multiple-choice questions, there will also be essay questions to test applicants’ abilities to think and express themselves. It has also been decided that for English, private-sector proficiency tests will be used to evaluate the four skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. In addition, in order that applicants may be evaluated in a multifaceted and comprehensive way, consideration is being given to making wide use of applicants’ records up through high school, such as their learning outcomes and school assessments. These two kinds of changes are expected to have a major impact on learning up through the end of high school.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has chosen as the basis for the reforms the realization of a “curriculum open to society,” so the private sector is also predicted to play a larger role in education.

### Important prerequisites to making the reforms succeed

The new Courses of Study aim to foster diverse talents and abilities without decreasing the amount of knowledge or skills to be acquired. Yet, class hours cannot be extended much, so there are concerns that achieving the reform goals may mean increasing the burden on children by means such as unreasonable cramming and added homework. What is more, teaching methods for the fostering of diverse talents and abilities, as well as measurement methods for evaluation, will need to be developed. In order to achieve the teaching goals of the educational and entrance-exam reforms, teachers too will need to make preparations, but some

observers have pointed out that teachers have very little time available for making such preparations.

To achieve the aims of the educational and entrance-exam reforms, improvements will need to be made in teaching and evaluation, and it goes without saying that teachers will play a major role in such improvements. Also important, however, is what families, communities, and private businesses join together to do in support of the reforms. Rather than schools having to do everything, what is needed is for society as a whole to take responsibility for enriching the learning environment for children.

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