

2022 J-LEAP REPORT

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Konnichiwa! My name is Eimei Onoda. I'm currently working as an assistant Japanese teacher at Lockport Township High School in Illinois. Do you know where Illinois is? I know everybody knows Chicago! Chicago is in Illinois, and Illinois is located in the Midwest bordering Indiana to the east and the Mississippi River to the west. Illinois is called "the Land of Lincoln". As you may know, Chicago is one of the biggest cities in the world and the third largest city in the United States. Chicago is known as "the windy city". I was so excited to learn that I would be going to Chicago for J-LEAP because it is one of the cities in the U.S. that I have always dreamed about visiting!

The school is located in Lockport which is 30 miles southwest of Chicago. You can visit downtown Chicago by car or train. Lockport is one of the most historical cities in Illinois. Lockport thrived in its early days as the headquarters of the Illinois and Michigan canal which drove the economic development of the Midwest and in particular Chicago. This cemented Lockport's legacy as "the city that made Chicago famous."

Lockport Township High School and Japanese language program

Lockport Township High School (LTHS), where I am teaching Japanese, was established in 1910, so it has a very long history. There are about 4,000 students from grades 9 through 12 and it is in one of the largest school districts in Illinois. LTHS supports not only the students but also the school staff. Everybody is very friendly and kind. When I came here, they warmly welcomed me and made me feel like part of the team, so I am very happy to be here and proud to be a Porter! (LTHS staff and students are called Porters.)



Students here can choose to study Spanish, French, German, ASL (American Sign Language) or Japanese. Among the students, 156 of them are taking Japanese. Currently, my lead

teacher, Button-sensei and I have six classes. Students have Japanese class every day, and each class is 50 minutes long. The students enrolled in the program enjoy Japanese language and culture. Many of them have personal hobbies related to Japanese, and some of them would like to travel or work in Japan in the future, so they are very motivated to learn.



In order to provide students with the opportunity to experience Japanese culture, we organize many activities such as practicing Japanese calligraphy, cooking Okonomiyaki, participating in Onigiri Action and more. Our students also have the chance to make connections with Japanese high school students by using their Japanese language skills. For example, level 2 students participate in a pen pal project, while the level 3 and AP students participate in Global Classmates, an online language and cultural exchange program. I help students use the Japanese learned in class to express what they want to say when they are communicating with their peers in Japan. It always impresses me and makes me proud of our students when I see them communicate with their peers in Japan.

My lead teacher (LT) and our teamwork

I am teaching Japanese with my lead teacher (LT), Karla Button-sensei. Since I met her at our initial training in Seattle, she has always been very Genki, friendly and always has a big smile!! She always makes people cheerful and happy. Button-sensei helps me with many things as I am adjusting to my new life in the U.S. She always takes care of me and has given me many wonderful experiences during my time here.

She launched the Japanese language program 22 years ago at Lockport Township High School. Before becoming the teacher, she was actually a student here. She is very passionate about teaching and students. Moreover, she knows the students well and how to teach language in a fun way. Therefore, I am learning not only how to teach Japanese in the U.S. but also how to manage a classroom. I would like to learn more about building good relationships with students like Button-sensei does and how to keep students engaged in learning Japanese.



Prior to coming here, I was teaching Japanese language to adult students from other countries at a college in Kyoto. Therefore, in the beginning, I needed to get used to interacting with American high school students. Button-sensei, however, always explains clearly what I need to do, offers good advice and encourages me to challenge myself in the classroom. She always says this is “our” class and always listens to my opinions and ideas. Furthermore, we share our ideas so we make a good team.

Button-sensei and I will keep trying to create fun and engaging lessons so that the students enjoy learning Japanese and remain interested in the Japanese language and culture!

My life (Homestay)



I had been living with a host family, who is also related to Button-sensei. Thanks to my host family, I could settle down and become acclimated to my new life in Illinois. I am very lucky that I could meet such a wonderful family here. My host family belongs to a nonprofit veteran’s service organization because my host father was previously part of the military. It was a great opportunity to know about the history of American military service through my homestay. Because my host parents can cook very well, I always ate everything they made. Since I ate a lot of everything they made, my host family started to call me a “monster” as a joke. I was very happy that they treated me as a real family member to the extent that we felt comfortable joking with each other.

My host family has two children who also took Button-sensei’s Japanese class at LTHS when they were high school students. They have already left home for college and work; yet they still tried to use Japanese with me as much as possible when they returned home to visit. I was very impressed, and we always started our conversation with Japanese greetings! Even my host parents started to use Japanese greetings since then! This is one of my sweet memories of them.

Thanks to them, I better understood American culture and homemade food. I also enjoyed communicating with them. Even though I have started to live by myself after being in the U.S. for three months, my host family still takes care of me. We still keep in touch. I really appreciate them from the bottom of my heart.

Finally, I appreciate all the support I've received from the Japan Foundation, the Laurasian Institution, my lead teacher, other ATs, my host family, my friends and my family in Japan. Thanks to them, I am having such a wonderful time and a truly rewarding experience in the U.S. My main goal is for our students and community to know more about Japan and to keep supporting LTHS students as they mature into adults who are able to broaden their perspective through Japanese language education.