

2022 J-LEAP REPORT

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Who am I?

Hello, I am Shiho Yabuuchi from Osaka. I work as an assistant Japanese teacher at Kennedy High School in Iowa. I was working in a beverage company before I came to the U.S. and had little experience as a teacher. The reasons why I decided to change my career and applied for the program is that I realized that education is the best way to expand people's perspectives and increase

their opportunities in their life. Furthermore, it is my life mission to be the bridge between the world and Japan since I am proud of Japanese culture and want more people to know about it.

Where do I live?

Have you ever heard of the city Cedar Rapids before? I thought they said "Peter Rabbit" or "See the rabbits" when I heard the name for the first time. It is not a big city in the U.S. but has a lot of big-hearted people. Cedar Rapids is an economic hub of Iowa state and has a large population, second only to Des Moines, the state capital city. People here often joke "We only have corn!" but it's not true. They have a lot of good restaurants and sightseeing spots like Mt. Trashmore, Chech Village and New Bohemia. Furthermore, Cedar Rapids is ranked as one of the best places to raise children in America every year.

The 5 largest ethnic groups in Cedar Rapids are White (Non-Hispanic) (80.1%), Black or African American (Non-Hispanic) (7.96%), Two+ (Non-Hispanic) (4.13%), White (Hispanic) (3.01%), and Asian (Non-Hispanic) (2.96%). You can easily understand there are few Japanese and I was a little nervous that I might live in an area with very few Asian people before I have moved here. However, I did not need to worry about it since people are always friendly and support each other. It was completely different from my expectation, but in a good way. People are always friendly and support each other. It's common to be spoken to by a stranger on the street, like "Where are you from?" "I want to go Japan someday!". I have only spent half a year so far but I already like it here a lot.

Where do I teach?

• School

Kennedy High School has roughly 1700 students and 150 teachers. It is the largest high school student body size in the Cedar Rapids Community School District. They took the #1 spot in county for the 2023 Niche.com school rankings that are rated by both test score performance and survey data. They came in #5 in the state as well.

It was a huge finding for me that they value the way of thinking “to be uncommon” a lot and I can see those words everywhere in our building. I have never heard this idea in Japan during my school days and I had an education that valued more “to be common”. Both of them have good aspects but I prefer the idea here since it helps students to enhance their good points and expand their perspectives.

• Japanese class

They have 5 world languages, Spanish, French, German, Chinese and Japanese. World languages are not required to everyone and they are optional. Carolin-sensei, my awesome lead teacher, and I have 5 different levels of Japanese classes, Japanese1 through 4 and AP(Advanced Placement). We mostly



teach following the text books but we put a lot of cultural information and use authentic materials as much as possible in each unit. For instance, when we introduced how to describe time in Japanese, we used real train time schedules in Tokyo to practice and shared how important trains are for Japanese. We believe introducing culture and utilizing authentic material will help students to get understanding well. Furthermore, it will raise their motivation to learn Japanese since they do not have many opportunities to experience Japanese culture in their daily life as I mentioned before.

• Bell schedule

We have 2 different schedules (A-day and B-day) alternately. We talk about the next day of classes during the preparation period and after school.

Period	Time	A-day	B-day
1 st period	7:50- 9:25	Japanese 2	Japanese 4/AP
2 nd period	9:30-11:05	Preparation	Japanese 3
3 rd period	11:10-1:10	Japanese 1	Japanese 2
Lunch	12:10-12:40		
4 th period	1:15-2:50	Japanese1	Preparation



What do I achieve in 2 years?

Thanks to my great lead teacher and host family, I got used to living in a new place and working as an assistant teacher during these 5 months. Now, it's about time to take new actions and I would like to achieve at least 3 things in the remaining 17 months. First, offering our students the opportunities to work with Japanese students during class. It would help students to study not just a language in the textbook but practical Japanese. Second,

holding Japanese events outside of school. There are few events related to Asian culture in Cedar Rapids and I would like to organize Japanese culture events involving students. Last but not least, spreading the attraction of J-LEAP to Japanese and increasing the number of people who want to be a bridge between the world and Japan just like me. I am currently working on creating a website to share the real life of J-LEAPER and it will be released soon. I believe it would help people to increase their interest in working outside of Japan and the charms of being a Japanese teacher at the same time.

I am grateful to be a part of J-LEAP and to get a lot of support from the Japan Foundation, Lurasian Institution, Kennedy High School, Carolin-sensei and my family in the U.S. and Japan. I will do my best to achieve my goals!