

# 2023/2024 J-LEAP REPORT



**By Rio Kimoto**

*Palmer High School*

*Palmer, AK*

## ***Who am I?***

Hajimemashite! My name is Rio Kimoto. I am a J-LEAP year 12 Assistant Teacher (AT) and I have been co-teaching with an enthusiastic Japanese teacher, Mrs. Carla Swick, at Palmer High School in

Alaska. This is my first career as a teacher in my life. Every day is a learning curve, but I am working hard-one day at a time, one step at a time!

I would like to share about my work and life here in Palmer, Alaska.

## ***The Last Frontier, Alaska***

What comes up when you speak of Alaska? For me, it is obviously NATURE! As you may know, seeing the northern lights is one of the popular Alaskan activities for tourism. That is one of the things for me I would definitely love to see!

The name "Alaska" is derived from the Aleut "alaxsxaq", meaning "the mainland". As its name says, Alaska is the largest state in the U.S. and its land is approximately 4.6 times bigger than Japan! Surrounded by mountains, forests and sea, I can feel close to nature anytime. I have already experienced fishing, camping, hiking, and a glacier cruise even though it has only been 3 months since I arrived! I saw a black bear on the Kenai River and moose in my yard. Everyone I have met has been so kind and has welcomed me and said "Welcome to Alaska!" with their smiles. There are many people who have visited Japan before or love Japanese culture. I was surprised by how many people in faraway places are interested in the Japanese language and culture. I love Alaska's beautiful nature, animals, and warm people.

### ***About Palmer High School***

Go Moose! - The Moose is the mascot of Palmer High School (PHS). PHS is part of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District, which is 25,000 square miles or about the same size as the state of West Virginia or the country of Scotland! The district teaches more than 19,000 students. There are about 664 students from grades 9 through 12 of Palmer High. Among the students, 64 of them are taking our Japanese classes. In addition, PHS is one of eight high schools in Mat-Su Borough and it is the only high school offering Japanese class. Also, PHS has an International Baccalaureate (IB) Program and the only such program in the Mat-Su Borough School District. This year, Swick-sensei and I teach three levels of Japanese classes. Japanese 1, Japanese 2, and IB Japanese.



Palmer, Alaska and Saroma in Hokkaido have been sister cities since 1980. We have a sister school exchange program. This year, we welcomed the Saroma Delegation in September. At that time, our Japanese students introduced them to their recommended places, food and cultural things about Palmer, Alaska or whatever they want them to try. That was a great time for everyone to share culture and to feel the connection. Next summer, representatives from Palmer High School and Palmer Jr. Middle School will visit Saroma. I hope this program will continue for a long time and give opportunities to students to make connections with Japan.

### ***What I am doing in the class***



Our classes begin with the greetings “Ohayou Gozaimasu!” or “Konnichiwa!” and small talk with a smile to each student in front of the classroom door. It's only a few dozen seconds or so, but it's an important time. Communicating with each student can motivate the classes and provide them an opportunity to make connections with us. I try to smile and enjoy my own classes so that I can be seen as an easy-to-talk-to teacher for our students.

Three months into the school year, students in the Japanese1 class are able to make simple self-introductions. This is surprising to me. It is interesting to see how they learn Japanese in Japanese, not English. In our class, I try to use comprehensive input, gestures, sign language, facial expression, authentic material, and my own slideshows. Language will stay longer in their brain if the language is connected with other elements. This is what I learned in my first three months.

This year, 2023-2024, the Mat-Su District is focusing on improving writing skills in all subjects, not just language courses. I feel the weakness of writing in Japanese class as well. We made our SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-Bound) goal with a French teacher as a world language department. We focus on the IB class to improve their Japanese writing skills. I want to try to find the most effective way to improve their writing skills.

I am looking forward to continuing to learn more English grammar words, so I can more easily explain Japanese sentence structure.

### ***Big picture toward 2 years***

I want to give people the opportunity to enrich their lives by learning world languages. This is also the reason why I decided to apply for this program. I myself studied abroad in Denmark when I was in university and encountered the culture and diversity of many different countries. At the same time, I learned the importance of understanding and respecting different cultures and the need to think flexibly in order to live in a global society. This experience has certainly led to J-LEAP. "I want to try to study abroad," "I want to try to study that country." I would be happy to be that student's spark. And I would be even more happy if it was Japan!

Finally, I appreciate such a great opportunity and all the support I've received. Thanks to everyone around me, I got used to working and living in a new place. Working and living in the U.S. is never easy. Getting a Social Security Number and car license, purchasing a car, creating a bank account, etc. Everything I need to be here is not easy. Without support, I would not have been able to do these steps. I would like to thank the Japan Foundation, Laurasian Institution, Palmer High School, Swick-sensei, other LTs, other ATs, my training coach, my host family, my family, and all my friends for their encouragement and support. I am very happy to be a part of J-LEAP!