



2026 Special Training Program for Japanese-Language Teachers Report



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As part of the Japan Foundation Program, our group visited Konosu High School in Saitama Prefecture. The moment we stepped into the hallway, students called out cheerful greetings — “Hello!” — in English. Throughout the day, wherever we walked, students smiled, waved, and offered warm hellos. The principal and teachers prepared thoughtful presentations and engaging lessons, and they made us, the visiting American teachers, feel like truly special guests. It was a wonderful experience, yet it also left me with unexpected sadness.

When we boarded the chartered bus at the end of the day, administrators, teachers, and a group of students lined up outside the entrance and waved goodbye until we were completely out of sight. I suddenly remembered that I used to know this custom. When I lived with a Japanese host family during college, my host mother would stand outside every morning and wave as I rode my bicycle down the road until I disappeared around the corner. I felt seen then, and I felt seen again at Konosu.

Sadly, this kind of hospitality is not common in the United States. In Japan, foreign visitors stand out immediately—there simply aren’t many exchange students from the U.S. in Japanese high schools. In the U.S., however, diversity is the norm. We don’t typically think, “Oh, that person is a foreigner.” If a group of Japanese teachers or students visited my school, I doubt anyone would take special notice. The principal might offer a quick hello before returning to work. Students in the hallway probably wouldn’t stop, smile, or greet visitors in their native language. And no one—neither students nor administrators—would line up outside to wave goodbye until the bus disappeared. Imagining Japanese visitors in an American school makes my heart ache. They would likely feel confused, unwelcome, and burdensome.



After visiting the high school, I was reminded that I may be the first connection many of my American students ever have with Japan. I thought about expressions like *omotenashi*—wholehearted, anticipatory hospitality—and *ichigo ichie*, the philosophy that every encounter is a unique, unrepeatable treasure.

These ideas encourage hosts to care for guests with sincerity, attention, and presence, without expecting anything in return. Can hospitality be taught? Can it be learned? I hope so. I left Japan determined to teach my students about manners, hospitality, and thoughtfulness through both word and action.



There were countless wonderful aspects of the program: the teachers, the organization, the facilities, and the excursions. I felt like a guest of honor most of the time, even when I was simply a student in the classroom. Japanese hospitality goes far beyond greetings and bows. It includes anticipating every possible need and removing every

possible discomfort. The program directors ensured that every imaginable inconvenience was addressed. They created opportunities for us to become friends, which was invaluable given how much time we would spend together. The facilities were comfortable, and all necessary living supplies were provided. Before each major event, we were briefed on what to expect, what to wear, what we might need to say, and how we should behave. We were given food, drinks, cash cards, train passes, and ample free time to explore. We visited the best sightseeing locations, stayed in excellent lodgings, and enjoyed wonderful meals. Helpers were available 24/7 if we needed anything. And on top of all this, we participated in excellent classes and activities to improve our Japanese language and teaching skills.

I couldn't have had a better experience. I want to send all my appreciation to the staff in both Los Angeles and Japan who made this experience possible