

MARCH, 2017: BREEZE ISSUE #113

A FREE MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF JAPAN & TEACHERS OF JAPANESE



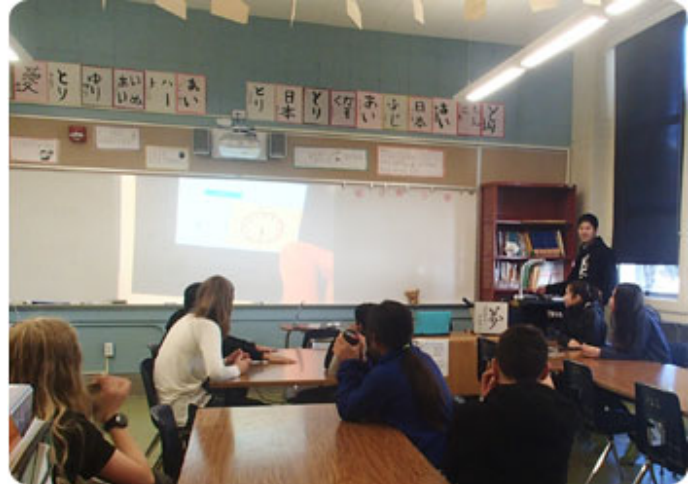
2016 J-LEAP REPORT BY RIKIYA KAWANO

*Presidio Middle School
San Francisco, CA*

Hi there, my name is Rikiya Kawano. I have been working as a Japanese Assistant Teacher for half a year at Presidio Middle School, which is located in San Francisco, CA. I was born and raised in Kakogawa city, Hyogo and I studied abroad in the States for two years during college. I was in Los Angeles, California and St. Louis, Missouri when I last studied here. This is the first time I have ever worked in the U.S. and I am very grateful to work at this school and teach Japanese to American students. I am so blessed to work in this city and to experience a lot of new things every day through the J-LEAP program.

San Francisco is a financially and culturally centered city in northern California. California is such a big state, which is about the same size as Japan. However, San Francisco itself is quite small and very dense. This is a city of immigrants and it has a great diversity of races and cultures. It also has a lot of people who can't afford to live in the city, because it is expensive to live here. Especially in a last few decades, the Bay Area including San Francisco has boomed in the area of technology. Many tech companies have settled here and many tech workers started to move into San Francisco. The cost of living has been rising dramatically since then. It affected many local residents that were unable to pay rent in the city, and they had no choice but to move out of the city. It directly affected the education system in the city. There are students from wealthy and non-wealthy families attending our school.

Presidio Middle School is the only public middle school offering a Japanese program in San Francisco. Our school district has approximately 55,300 students. Presidio Middle School is located in a Chinese neighborhood. There are about 1,100 students studying at this school. The student demographics are 50% of Asian students, 22% of white students, and 10% of Latino students. It offers Spanish and Japanese as elective classes besides dance, art, and computer classes. Most of the students who take Japanese, have been studying since they were in elementary school. When they entered Presidio Middle School, they chose Japanese for their elective class as a pathway program. Therefore, they take Japanese as an elective class for three more years in the middle school. What is more, they study Japanese for 50 minutes daily from Monday to Friday.



We teach students about all the beautiful traditional Japanese culture and its aesthetics. For example, we introduced Mochitsuki (pounding rice cake), Onigiri (making rice balls) project for the world food day, Tsukimi (moon viewing with dango rice dumplings), Hatsumoude (first visit to pray at the shrines), Setsubun (rid of demons via bean throwing), and Kakizome (the first calligraphy of the year). We also had students wear yukata and kimono and they learned about sumo wrestling. Furthermore, we incorporated

modern culture, which is very popular with people all over the world today such as anime, manga, and j-pop.

In the first three months of working here, I had a hard time managing middle school students, since I never worked with kids before. Also, at times, they didn't listen to me and they said some rude things to me. I spoke Japanese to students during and after school as much as I can. I didn't really feel they respected me either. First of all, it is not a special thing for a Japanese person to teach Japanese in San Francisco. There are always many foreigners coming and going here and many of our students have Japanese parents or know



someone who has a Japanese background. That is why my background doesn't make them interesting since they already have been exposed to Japanese language, culture and way of life. Therefore, I wanted to make myself interesting to them by being who I am. However, since they don't speak Japanese to me, it was a challenge to make a connection with them. Every time I speak to them in Japanese, they get confused or feel shy to talk. They always reply to me in English even though I told them that I don't speak any English. However, I gradually got used to the students by learning how to deal with them. By understanding that they are developing at their own speed, we built good relationships together. When I started to teach here, what I was mainly doing was walking around and observing the classes to figure out ways I can contribute to Tanaka Sensei's class. I gradually started to be able to assist students who have a hard time understanding class instructions and working on some tasks. In addition to this, I help assist various student activities initially, and then Tanaka Sensei takes over. In some classes, I teach some higher level students who are heritage students or already know some Japanese. In doing so, they began to recognize me, as an assistant teacher, more than a just being a teaching assistant.

My lead teacher, Tanaka Sensei, is a well experienced, kind and open-minded. She always smiles and is open to new ideas and tries new things, which has a positive influence on our teaching. She always asks me about what I think about her ideas and her teaching plans. I feel comfortable expressing my opinions and my teaching ideas to her. We always share and discuss her lesson plans, talk about our students, and think about activities together. I think this is a significantly fundamental process for team teaching. Also, it is our main focus to encourage young learners to speak Japanese and to create a comfortable environment where they feel safe to make a lot of mistakes since "mistakes are treasures". I believe that this growth mindset also applies to improving our teaching. We always have to come up with good ideas, which can enhance and maximize their Japanese skills. Since we see the same students everyday, we always have to keep entertaining them and encourage them to act responsibly at the same time.

My mother has been working at middle schools and she told me that it takes at least half a year to get used to working at a middle school. I strongly agree with her and after six months, I sort of figured out what I can do in class. I will keep learning how to teach them with the help of Tanaka sensei.

Breeze #122



Breeze #121



Breeze #120



Breeze #119

Breeze #118

Breeze #117

Breeze #116

Breeze #115



Breeze #114



Breeze #113



Japanese Language Education Update 40

2016 J-LEAP Report: Rikiya Kawano

2016 J-LEAP Report: Chizuru Imase

Breeze #112



Breeze #111



Headquarters New York Office Center for Global Partnership Volunteer
ボランティア募集 Japan Related Links Job Openings (Updated)

5700 Wilshire blvd, Suite 100
Los Angeles, CA 90036
P. 323.761.7510

Annual Report

© 2019 The Japan Foundation, Los Angeles

[Privacy](#) - [Terms](#)

Web Design.