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2015 J-LEAP REPORT BY AMI KANEKO

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Hello. My name is Ami Kaneko and I am currently working as a Japanese Assistant Teacher at Maloney Interdistrict Elementary Magnet School (Maloney School) in Waterbury, Connecticut.

Connecticut is located in Northeastern part of the U.S., known as New England. It's bordered by New York to the west and Massachusetts to the north. During the autumn season in Connecticut, we can see the leaves changing color, which makes the scenery beautiful. Waterbury, which is the 5th largest city in Connecticut, is the town where Maloney School is located.

Maloney School is a magnet school. In the U.S. education system, magnet schools are public schools with specialized courses or curricula. Since the specialized curriculum at Maloney School is the Japanese Language and Culture Program, all students must take Japanese class. There are approximately 600 students in total at Maloney School. Another unique feature about magnet schools is that students are not only from one school district, but also from other districts. This means we have students who are from different areas.

Kazumi-sensei, my lead teacher, and I teach Japanese from Pre-K to 5th grade. All students study Japanese 25 minutes a day, 3 times a week. Because taking Japanese is required at Maloney School, we try to make the class as enjoyable and fun as possible. We believe that the Japanese class is fun for our students, then their motivation for learning Japanese will increase. [Privacy](#) - [Terms](#)

increase. So, we try to teach in creative ways such as, singing, playing games, and acting out skits, instead of learning out of textbooks. Every grade has different content related to Japanese culture. For example, we are currently teaching 1st grade students about schools in Japan. During this class, we teach them not only school related vocabulary, but also the differences between Japanese and American schools. Just like in Japan, students take their shoes off when they enter the school; they also clean the classroom by themselves. Through these experiences, students are able to learn about Japanese language and culture at the same time in Japanese class.

During class, we speak in Japanese more than 90% of the time and so do the students. When I first came here, I was surprised by this because I thought that using English would be helpful for students to understand Japanese. However, when we speak in Japanese, students try to understand what we say. I realized that this way of teaching Japanese, in Japanese, is sometime more attractive for them than using English.

Furthermore, students don't see speaking Japanese as such a foreign concept anymore, as they often greet me in Japanese in the hallway outside of class. During these past 3 months, I've learned that the important thing is to not make students understand Japanese completely from the beginning, but to help give them confidence in understanding Japanese first. Through saying Japanese words many times, they are able to understand these words naturally. Sometimes when students have difficulty saying something in Japanese, we don't want to give them the answer right away or rush them to say it. We wait for them as much as we can and give them some hints. Then, if students can answer it in Japanese, they feel a sense of accomplishment, which gives them confidence to speak more. These little steps encourage students to learn Japanese. In class, I'm in charge of the daily routine, activity demonstrations, conversation modeling, and student support for those who are behind, etc.



Besides having Japanese class, there are some events such as Shinnenkai (New Year's party) or Natsumatsuri (summer festival) celebrated throughout the year. While celebrating these events, students learn not only the Japanese language, but also about the culture. In addition to these events, there is a Japanese after school program once a week. Students who want to continue to learn Japanese after they have graduated Maloney School attend this program.

Since I began teaching here, I heard wonderful comments from the students. In class, some students say, "I really want to go to Japan!" or "Japan is cool!" When I heard that, I was really impressed and happy. As a Japanese teacher, I hope all students come to like Japan and want to learn Japanese more. I believe our Japanese class will influence them in a good way.

I set two goals for myself for the next two years: One is to keep learning. The other one is to be a reliable teacher. For my continued learning, I'd like to absorb a lot of things from Kazumi-sensei, teachers in Maloney, and our students. I'll try not to waste this wonderful experience and not to forget the feeling that I had when I first came here. After 2 years, I hope to bring back to Japan the teaching skills I learned here. I believe the experience from team teaching with Kazumi-sensei will make me a more trusted and reliable teacher.

I graduated from my university in Japan last March. At that time, I never thought I would be teaching Japanese in the U.S. This is my first experience teaching, working, and living by myself. Since everything is new to me here, I've been learning a lot of things, and everyday has been fulfilling. I really appreciate this opportunity that allows me such a wonderful experience and I am grateful to all of the people who have supported me. I'll do my best for the rest of my time here.

Thank you.

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