

JANUARY, 2016: BREEZE ISSUE #99

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



2015 J-LEAP REPORT BY HIROKO AKIYAMA

*Dunsmore Elementary School
La Crescenta, CA*

Hello, I'm Hiroko Akiyama. I have been working as Japanese assistant teacher with the 1st grade lead teacher, Ms. Melanie Arayama, and a kindergarten teacher at Dunsmore Elementary School in La Crescenta, California. I would like to tell you about La Crescenta, the school I work at, my duties in class, and my goals for the next two years.

California is a big state that occupies most of the West Coast of the United States. Which cities do you think of when people mention California? You might think of major cities like San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego. But do you know where La Crescenta is? It is located north of LA County. Most Japanese people might think of Hollywood, Santa Monica and Long Beach when they hear "LA", and they might think that they can go to these areas in one day. But those cities are just parts of LA County. When I came here the first time, I thought those cities were very close and easy to get to because they were in the city of LA. Eventually I realized that LA is much bigger than I expected.

La Crescenta has beautiful nature and is a homey environment. The school is surrounded by a lot of greens that makes me very happy to work here. My school is a public school with a Japanese dual immersion program, but this program just has started last year. The immersion program is only for kindergarten and 1st grade. This year, there are 48 students in kindergarten and 31 students in 1st grade. The school also has English-only classes. In immersion classes, spend half the time speaking in English and half in Japanese. Students learn subjects like Science, Social studies and Art in both languages. They learn about the library, music an...

Physical Education (P.E.) in English. Also, there are a few things that are different from Japanese elementary school and it surprised me. First, they have a general class schedule for one day, but the teacher can decide on the subjects that are covered in class. The good thing is teachers can control the pace of the lesson. On the other hand, the class schedule for each subject has been determined in advance at schools in Japan, and they have five or ten minutes break time during each class, therefore students prepare for the next class during break time. Second, while students in Japan have sportswear for P.E., they don't change clothes here. The most surprising and impressive thing for me is that they have a lot of parents' volunteering in class and supporting the many events here. We don't have such help at school in Japan.

Currently, I am lucky enough to work in both the 1st grade and kindergarten classes. We have different levels of students in each class. Some students have a Japanese background and can speak the language fluently, but others don't and they are working hard to try to learn Japanese. I work with the kindergarten class twice a week, and the 1st grade class three days a week. In Japanese class, we speak only in Japanese. If we speak English a bit in class, the students always say with a happy look, "Teacher speaks English." One of the challenging things of this program is when students can't understand what we say; we have to try to explain it in an easier form of Japanese. Sometimes I felt it was easier for both of us to say some words in English because they know English. But recently I felt that they can understand what we say and they try to speak Japanese more. It takes time but they are learning a lot of difficult things by using their young minds. It is much tougher for them because the class is taught in an unfamiliar language. I realized that I must recognize their progress no matter how small and I praise them every chance I get. That encourages them to work harder to learn Japanese. The good thing about this program is that it also helps their critical thinking ability grow when trying to figure out things in their mind.

During class, I usually help late students catch up in class, get students to pay attention in class, assist the teacher such as performing a short skit together, and plan lessons together. For the kindergarten class, the students are too young to keep their concentration all the way through the lesson, so we try to plan activities so they can practice their Japanese like they are playing a game. The other day, I asked them whether they enjoyed the activity, and they told me that they had a lot of fun. I was so happy to hear that and some students who don't speak Japanese that much during class could eventually speak it without help. For the 1st grade class, I am in charge of reading comprehension in small groups, and making materials for it. Students are very honest and it is clear for them to show if they are interested in or not. That's why it is my task to plan lessons that are fun and that's how I proceed with it.



Lastly, I would like to tell you about my goals for these two years. I have two goals; one is being a teacher who they will remember even after I leave. Two years seems to be a long time but it will go by very fast. I feel that our students have been growing little by little during the past four months. I am very pleased that they remember my name and say hello to me and give me hugs when I meet them outside of class. It is a little sad that I can only see them grow for two years, but I am also looking forward to seeing them learn to be able to speak Japanese more than they can now. Therefore, I would like to do my best for them by having fun speaking Japanese. My other goal is to progress as a Japanese teacher. It is so different teaching children instead of adults. I have to change even the word used to explain the meanings and the method. So I would like to learn more about immersion system and how they acquire their target language in such an environment.

I would like to thank my lead teacher, Ms. Arayama and our kindergarten teacher to let me have a lot of opportunities to teach as assistant teacher and lastly I want to thank Dunsmore Elementary School for having me.

Thank you.

Breeze #110	▼
Breeze #109	▼
Breeze #108	▼
Breeze #107	▼
Breeze #106	▼
Breeze #105	▼
Breeze #104	▼
Breeze #103	▼
Breeze #102	▼
Breeze #101	

Breeze #100



Breeze #99



Japan Found Me Campaign

2015 J-LEAP Report: Eriko Seki

2015 J-LEAP Report: Hiroko Akiyama

Japanese Language Education Update 26

J-LEAP Followup Training in San Diego

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Jonathan Li

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Michelle Lin

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Stephany Lopez

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Noah Lovell

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

Web Design.

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