

# Civic Engagement in Public Management:

## A Case of School Lunch Program in Japan

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### Introduction

Ending 'welfare state' is a global phenomenon since the 1990s. It argues that government should refrain from the involvement in social services if it is burdened by revitalization of market economy. To make government friendlier to the market, political and economic leaders have proposed privatization of state-owned companies, regulatory relief for economic activities, and introduction of competition into the public organizations. These reform measures are packaged under a popular phrase of "New Public Management (NPM)." NPM is not a clearly defined management tool but a collection of different reform measures to improve efficiency of public service provisions. As existing studies explore, we will be able to sort the NPM through two broad categories (Hood 1991; Ferlie *et al.* 1996). The first approach attempts to change centralized, hierarchical bureaucracies to a number of single-purpose executive agencies with certain managerial autonomy (Pollitt and Talbot 2004). The establishment of "executive agencies", which originated in Sweden in eighteenth century, became fashionable among Anglo-American countries in the 1990s. It was followed by the introduction of performance based payment in the executive agencies and external evaluation of the agency performance. These reform measures have been thought out from "neo classical economics" and "new institutional economics." Underlying assumption is that creation of competitive market in the public sector reduces unnecessary expenditure and improves the quality of service provisions. The second approach challenges the traditional Weberian theory of public administration. This approach originates from business management improvements since the 1980s. Two best selling books, "In Search of Excellence" (Peters and Waterman 1982) and "Reengineering the Corporation" (Hammer and Champy 1993), have influenced public managers to adopt business success stories into their organizations. "Breaking through Bureaucracy" (Barzelay 1992) and "Reinventing Government" (Osborne and Gaebler 1992) are the most influential books for public managers. Reform measures in this approach includes the TQM, "reengineering," flatten organization, program evaluation, bench marking, Management by Objectives, etc.

As NPM contains a variety of "new" reform measures, it became a fad among the world public managers throughout the 1990s. However, the Organization for the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recently launched international study on the post NPM reform agenda in member countries, insisting that it is now evident that such instrumentalist reforms can have unforeseen effects on government as a whole (OECD/PUMA 2002). One of the failures of instrumentalist approach is a failure to understand that public management arrangements not only deliver public services, but also "institutionalize" deeper governance values

(ibid.: 6). OECD Research Paper notes;

“For example, the idea of professional independence of the civil service, to ensure non-partisan continuity of politics, is most effectively expressed in the culture of the public service. Changing the incentive systems for senior civil servants may inadvertently undermine that professional independence, or some other important governance value such as the disposition of the civil service to work collectively (ibid.: 7).

This provides us a doubtful eye on the convergence theory of NPM reform, noting that effectiveness and outcome of reform instruments may vary among countries, and among policy arenas, too. We should distinguish inherent governance values from those developed in other environment, paying attention to the phenomenon of “mimetic isomorphism” among the countries (Dimmagio and Powell 1983). Rather, this article emphasizes that divergence appears in the realm of governance change around the world. In case of Japan, for example, the civil service has preserved a high public spiritedness both at national and local levels for a long period, while it has been criticized as bureaucratic elitism in democratic system. It was the 1980s that political leader first made a trumpet of “administrative reforms” to reduce the power of bureaucratic elite. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) led Cabinets reorganized central machinery and proposed civil service reform in the end of the last century, welcoming reform ideas of NPM. It raises a question of possible outcome of exotic reform instruments over the inherent governance values of Japan.

In analyzing such changes in Japan, this paper looks into the issues of educational reform and school meal program in Japan. Japan’s educational system retains a centralized, bureaucratic nature, though it was reformed to democratic after the World War II. The Ministry of Education has been responsible to the provision of impartial education service throughout the country, collaborating with local education boards. The school lunch program has developed with a strong involvement of the national government since the 1950s. Although it had contributed to economic growth so much in the past, however, education and nutrition programs for children begin to change recently. Private sector leadership and the promotion of decentralization affect professional, but bureaucratic provision of educational services at local level. Parent groups prefer ‘liberation of school ward assignment’<sup>1)</sup>, for they can choose better school. Those who distrust public education welcome private education companies, for it could provide intensive training for examination results in mathematics and language. Whither the public education? This paper suggests that public services are difficult to survive when they fail to be trusted by the community as a guardian of the public interest indispensable for the lives of community. This must be a new challenge for public schools and communities in Japan in the new millennium.

### Education Reform in Japan

Japanese public education features a mixture of centralized administration at the Ministry of Education and decentralized management by local education authorities. It derives from the historical path of education development in Japan. The notorious prewar bureaucratic authoritarian system of education was abolished in 1945 with the end of World War II. The Occupational Forces commanded the government of Japan to replace it to a decentralized, democratic structure modeled after the U.S. The new education law of 1946 established the Board of Education at prefecture and municipal level and the commissioners of the Boards were to be elected through the popular vote. However, the government revised the law in 1956 and changed the commissioners to be appointed by governor and mayor with the consent of local assembly. Under the revived bureaucratic structure, the Ministry of Education has championed in defining national education priorities subject to the business interest toward economic development and political interest in preserving cultural heritage of Japan.

However, the Japan Teachers' Union (JTU) had strongly opposed to the revival of traditional education from the standpoint of the promotion of democracy. As a result, the postwar education is a history of confrontation between the Education Ministry and the JTU. In 1984 the national government established the National Council on Educational Reform to propose new focus on internationalization and the advancement of information-oriented society. The 1980s was an era of administrative reforms, then, the Japan National Railways and other governmental corporations became privatized. However, the educational system suffered only marginal changes (thanks to strong resistance of the Japan Teachers' Union).

In March 2000, the Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi established the National Commission on Educational Reform. This opened a new beginning of substantial changes in the governance of education. Growing criticism says that the educational system has steadily deteriorated as evident in the worsening school violence, the bullying of fellow students, suicides that results from bullying, children refusing to attend school, disruptive behavior in the classroom, and the increasingly vicious nature of juvenile crime (Hase 2002: 101). Based on the Final Report of the Commission, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) prepared the Education Reform Plan for the Twenty First Century (hereinafter, the Reform Plan 21).

The Reform Plan 21 is designed to expose public schools to the principle of free market competition (Yoneyama 2002: 205). It emphasized the new curriculum of minimum requirement of teaching and learning. It means that schools could develop their own curriculum to cope with social and parent's demand for public education. This liberalization drive has been fuelled by the drastic reform experiments by the local governments. In 1999 the Shinagawa School Education Committee in Tokyo abolished the school zoning at the primary school level due to the decline of the number of students. Since then, other district education committees in Tokyo have followed the freed up of school zoning, aimed at the improvement of school management in the "problematic" schools. In 2000 the national government amended the School Education Law to permit local government to appoint a school principal who did not hold teaching qualification. Since then, the number of local education committees that appoint business managers as school principals is growing.

In 2002 the Prime Minister Jun'ichiro Koizumi announced the "structural reform special zone" program which called for local government to propose new programs in the form of petition to the cabinet to exempt national regulations. A number of local governments proposed a variety of special programs including educational reform such as "community school", school management by the private enterprises, English teaching curriculum in elementary schools, and so on. The Education Ministry agreed with these experiment programs except school management by private companies. Through these reform measures, traditional educational system has changed substantially. It changed the role of the Board of Education and school principals from administration to management. Business-minded mayors also promote competition among schools for coping with educational problems such as juvenile crime.

It seems clear that education is in the tide of liberalization reforms (Light 1997). However, at the same time, it also gives opportunities for communities to strengthen the ties between schools and communities. The reforms of school meals program are a good example in observing different trends emerging in the public governance.

### School Meal Program in Japan

Japan's school meal program has a good reputation for quality in nutrition and educational considerations. School meal program in Japan originates in 1889 in Tsuruoka Town, Yamagata Prefecture. A priest association provided lunch for poor children at *Chuai* Elementary School in a voluntary basis. Since then, a number of schools provided meals for economically depressed or malnutrition students as a welfare service. The Education

Ministry conducted first national survey in 1922. Based on that survey, the Ministry recommended local governments to provide meals for students from a standpoint of nutrition in 1923. In 1932 the Ministry of Education launched a national grant-in-aids program to relieve poor children by providing 510,000 yen for 11,000 schools across the country (Nihon Gakko Kyusyoku Kai 1976).

It was in the occupation era (1945-1952), that nation-wide school meals program started officially. In June 1946, aid organizations in the North and South America established the "LARA" (Licensed Agencies for Relief in Asia), and proposed to provide relief supplies for war victim Japanese. In the same year, the former U.S. President Hoover visited Japan as the representative of United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Authorities (UNRRA) and recommended for General Douglas MacArthur an immediate provision of school meal for Japanese children. After the talk between the General Headquarters and the Government of Japan, the Education Ministry submitted the National Plan of School Meals Provision and issued a circular titled "the promotion and dissemination of school meals practice" in 11 December 1946. Firstly, the administrative vice secretaries of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and the Ministry of Agriculture would present the standard of nutrition for children. Secondly, the School Meals Associations should be established at prefecture and executive committee at school. Thirdly, students should pay the expenses of meals. And finally, national subsidies could be provided for one professional worker hired at the prefecture and for equipment of school kitchen (Nihon Gakko Kyusyoku Kai 1976). It is interesting that the circular emphasized the effect of school lunch on the study of nutrition, training of eating habit, correction of unbalanced diet, and diffusion of democracy.

Based on this circular, a quarter million students in Tokyo, Kanagawa, and Chiba were to be provided school meals as a pilot base, and a presentation ceremony of LARA supplies (powdered skim milk, wheat flour, sugar, and bouillon) was held at Nagata Elementary School in Tokyo on 24, December 1946. In 1947, a nation-wide school meals program started with LARA supplies for 3,600 schools (3 million students) in elementary schools in cities. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) donated skimmed milk in 1949 and 1950. It was called "UNICEF school meal".

In 1954, the Government enacted the School Meals Law, due to the expiration of donated wheat flour by the US in 1951. The Law defined four objectives of school food program. (1) To nurture precise understanding and desirable habit of eating in a daily life. (2) To enrich school life and nurture sociability. (3) To promote rationalization of dietary habit, improvement of nutrition, and enhancement of health. (4) To lead students for precise understanding of production, distribution, and consumption of food. To achieve these objectives, the government should give financial aid for the establishment of school kitchen and sell wheat flour in a discount price for school meals. In the amendment of 1956, the school meals program extended to include junior high school. In 1957, the government started milk distribution for school lunch and provided financial aid to help dairy farmers. In 1968, the Japan School Meals Association was established as the special corporation to purchase supplies and sell them to schools. In the same year, the Ministry of Education established "Guideline for Teaching" in which the school lunch was defined as a part of the official school activity. This meant that all students are encouraged to take school lunch if that school participates in school meal program. As a result, participation rates for school meals program skyrocketed to over 90% in elementary school and 60% in Junior high school in the 1960s. A standard menu of the 1960s contained roll bread, margarine, milk, and cooked vegetables, cooked meat ("whale" meat were popular) or fish. National government subsidizes the expenditure on the establishment of school kitchen in school, and prefecture government finances personnel expenses of nutritionist and cooking staff.

		National total	Full meal		Supplement meal		Milk		Total	
			number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Elementary School	Number of schools	23,964	22,947	95.8	123	0.5	326	1.4	23,396	97.6
	Number of students	7,296,920	7,191,073	98.5	20,449	0.3	37,708	0.5	7,249,230	99.3
Junior High School	Number of schools	11,198	7,999	71.4	74	0.7	1,388	12.4	9,461	84.5
	Number of students	3,993,253	2,693,487	67.5	20,904	0.5	558,441	14.0	3,272,832	82.0
Special Class School	Number of schools	996	816	81.9	3	0.3	35	3.5	854	85.7
	Number of students	92,072	80,216	87.1	16	0.0	1,570	1.7	81,802	88.8
Night School	Number of schools	777	482	62.0	254	32.7	—	—	736	94.7
	Number of students	100,890	52,033	51.6	20,723	20.5	—	—	72,756	72.1
Total	Number of schools	36,935	32,244	87.3	454	1.2	1,749	4.7	34,447	93.3
	Number of students	11,483,135	10,016,809	87.2	62,092	0.5	597,719	5.2	10,676,620	93.0

Source: Nihon Taiiku/Gakko Kenko Center (2003), p.272.

Figure 1 School Meals Statistics in Japan (as of May 1, 2001)

The Figure 1 shows the present participation rate of school meals program. Ten million students participate in the school meals program and it covers 99.3% of students at elementary level and 93.1% of all students including junior high school. Most parents recognized the role of school meals and that it will contribute to the balanced nutrition, desirable dietary habit, nurturing good human relations and feelings of volunteering and cooperation, and understanding of food culture.

The uniqueness of Japanese school meal program is its educational considerations. The school meals are cooked at the school kitchen, and carried by the students to the classroom for consumption. The class teacher eats school meal with students to educate dietary habit and the importance of collective behavior. To assist these educational activities of schools, the national and local governments have supported school meal program through providing financial and in-kind aids under the School Education Act.

### School Lunch Program under Administrative Reforms

The school lunch program became an object of administrative reforms in the 1970s, under economic stagnation due to the oil shocks. School lunch program was not an exception. Mayors were encouraged to establish central kitchens to save money, for it could reduce employment of nutritionist and cooking staff. The Education Ministry took a lead in this direction by providing budget for the renewal of old school kitchens.

At national level, the Provisional Commission on Administrative Reform (*Rincho*) proposed to establish central kitchens and to employ part-time cooking workers in 1981. In 1983, the *Rincho* submitted its final report to the Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, saying that the provision of food supply by the Japan School Health Association (former Japan School Meals Association) should be abolished and the Association be consolidated with National Stadium Organization. The Final Report also stressed further rationalization of school meals program as follows from a standpoint of "pay as you go" principle.

- ① To reduce personnel expenses through rationalization such as conversion of school kitchen to central kitchen and contracting-out to private providers. In mid and long term, those who will benefit pay the operating cost of school meals. To reduce national assistance on rice, milk, and juice with considerations of national food policy.
- ② Due to the diffusion of school meals across the country, the national assistance became limited only in the provision of basic facilities, and reduced total expenditure for the school meal program.

These reform measures were reaffirmed in the Interim Report of Special Provisional Committee to Promote Administrative Reform in 1984, saying that local governments promote commissioning the service to the private sector. Following these statements the Ministry of Education issued the Circular titled "Streamlining the School Food Service" in January 21, 1985. It noted that management costs, including personnel expenses, need to be optimized through such measures as employing part-time staff, utilizing a central kitchen system, and commissioning the service to the private sector, while reflecting regional circumstances. In adopting these measures, municipal boards of education were asked to note followings.

#### (1) Employing part-time staff

- a. The number of days and work-hours assigned to part-time staff should be clearly different from those of full-time employees.
- b. Adequate training should be provided to part-time staff, if appropriate.

#### (2) Utilizing a central kitchen system

- a. Although the employment of part-time staff should be encouraged, efforts to improve the work efficiency of the cooking staff should also be carried out.
- b. The latest facilities and equipment should be installed to streamline cooking procedures with due care being given to hygiene and labor safety.

#### (3) Commissioning the service to the private sector

- a. Creating menus is the direct responsibility of the service provider and should not be commissioned.
- b. A management system that sufficiently reflects the intentions of the service provider should be established to ensure hygiene and safety in the purchase of goods, cooking activities, and other relevant operations.

Year	School Kitchen		Central Kitchen	
	Number of schools	Percentage	Number of schools	Percentage
2002	13,904	45.4	16,727	54.6
2001	14,041	45.6	16,7231	54.4

Source: *Eiyo Nippon* 47(2) (2004), p.32.

Figure 2 Percentage of School Kitchen/Central Kitchen

Year	cooking	delivery	Food purchase	Dish washing	Boiler maintenance
2002	13.4%	34.4%	9.5%	14.1%	14.9%
2001	11.5%	33.1%	9.3%	12.5%	14.9%

Source: *Eiyo Nippon* 47(2) (2004), p.33.

Figure 3 Contracting-out of School Meals Provision

c. It should be clearly stated in the contract that, when judged necessary by the service provider, measures to improve service operations, such as requesting the commissioned party to submit required data and other materials and conducting on-site inspections, can be taken.

d. In selecting the party to which the service is to be commissioned, it must be made clear that candidates are to fully acknowledge the meaning of the school food service and cooperate in its smooth operation.

Since then, a number of municipal boards of education converted school kitchen to central one for streamlining of school food administration. Figure 2 and 3 indicates that more than half of school meals are provided through central kitchens, and contracting-out measures are popular in the operations of delivery, cooking, and washing.

In 1994, the Ministry of Home Affairs instructed municipal governments to formulate administrative and fiscal reform guidelines, which attempt to promote contracting-out services and reduction of local public officials. In accordance with this instruction, local governments have promoted commissioning the school meals provision to the private sector. A rationalization directive from the center does not end in despite of the enactment of the decentralization promotion law in 1997. In 2003, the Ministry of Finance conducted the research on the budget execution of the school meals program. The outcome of the field research compelled the Ministry to recommend further reduction of school meals expenditure through commissioning of the cooking service to the private companies. The Ministry of Education issued an instruction paper to the directors of school food division of Prefecture Board of Education that reconfirms the contents of the Rationalization Directive of 1985.

#### Emerging New Partnership at Community Level: A Case of Fujisawa City, Kanagawa Prefecture

Although the conservative government and politicians trumpet the privatization of local public services, a

new partnership structure began to grow at the community level. In 1996 three students who ate school meal died of the E-Coli. Since then, many schools reviewed school kitchen system and called for the safety of school food. Parent groups became more sensitive to the health of children. Citizen action groups demanded schools to exclude genetically modified foods and to include more organic vegetables in school meal. In some communities, there emerge a variety of collaborations of school kitchens, local farmers, and voluntary groups using local agricultural products for school lunch program. Some schools have joined the recycling program that utilizes plate waste to convert into the fertilizer to study "environment issues". These actions suggest that new collaborative relationships among the stakeholders are emerging across Japan. Here, we are reminded that local public service should not be a bureaucratic model of procedure orientation, but a professional organization that can manage networks in the provision of quality service to community members. Although the pressure to reduce public spending is still high, such effort to revitalize public service through the collaboration will provide justification to the positive involvement of public service for the future of local governance. A case of Fujisawa City, Kanagawa Prefecture will provide a benchmark for better practice of school-community collaboration in Japan.

Fujisawa City is located at south of Tokyo metropolitan area with 380,000 population. In 1967, City Government of Fujisawa enacted a bylaw to establish area-wide central kitchens from economic consideration. The first central kitchen was established at North Fujisawa in 1967 with the capacity of 9,000 meals. Since then, four central kitchens were established in the 1970s. However, recognizing the importance of the direct provision of school lunch through school kitchen, the City Government revised its Comprehensive Plan to revive school kitchens in 1979. Since then, the City Government has subsidized for the construction of school kitchens and abolished three central kitchens.

In 1986, the Fujisawa Board of Education set the regulation to use soap replacing detergent in washing dish from the viewpoint of safety. In the 1990s, the Education Board and school nutritionists who have responsibility for purchasing food decided not to buy any Genetically Modified products as well as chemical seasonings. In the late 1990s, some elementary schools launched school-farm partnership programs as a part of food education. It includes a tour to neighbor farm for harvest and use of vegetables in school meals. The school-farm partnership program aims to provide an opportunity to teach children about the importance of sustainable agriculture and the value of nutrition food. This program is working through collaboration with teachers, school nutritionist, and local growers.

In the process of development, *Matano* Elementary School had a chance to be designated as a model school in school food education programs of the Ministry of Education from 2000 to 2002. During this period, *Matano* Elementary School conducted a series of researches on nutrition education in the classroom, effective use of lunch room, school gardening, voluntary activities of student associations, as well as collaboration with local farmers. In the use of lunch room, the teachers invited senior citizens who live in community for school lunch to take meals with students. The school principal, teachers, nutritionist, cooking staff, Education Board of Fujisawa City, local farmers, and the parents share the mission to provide quality meals and opportunities for students to study values of nutrition. One year later, *Matano* Elementary School was awarded by the Education Minister for achieving good results.

While other local governments seek to save educational cost by commissioning school kitchen to the private enterprises, Fujisawa City choose a costly handmade school lunch service for children in thinking of the long-term benefit for the community. However, it is not easy to disseminate such a good practice to the rest of Japan. Many parents who are indifference to dietary food provision may agree with the introduction of private catering

service only thinking of children's favorite. Or, school teacher may welcome outsourcing of school lunch program that seems to lessen the burden of teachers to teach dietary habit to difficult students. Furthermore, strict fiscal conditions stress city government to be more efficient through the acceptance of economic measures. It is difficult for schools to be exempted from this stream.

### Conclusion

Education reform becomes a common agenda in most countries. In a tide of result-based management since the 1980s, education too has come into the list of new public management reform. In Japan, liberalization of education system is proposed loudly for the competitiveness in an age of "global economy." Decentralization drive encourages diffusion of free zoning of public school, appointment of business person to school principals, and the emergence of private company owned school. "Breaking through bureaucracy" is now a popular phrase among local political managers.

However, "value for money" in education is hard to measure, especially in a short time frame, because education is a complex, but critical societal activity. It is also true in the case of school meal provision. It originated from voluntary efforts of the society in early years (Gunderson 1971). Later, government took the responsibility for feeding children for the welfare of the poor, and in some part, for the welfare of industries. At present, government provides school meals for the nutrition of children. It means that health becomes a new mission of education. Health is also difficult to achieve through the market alone. Junk foods and sweet beverage are available for kids in stores and vending machine at every corner of the communities. It suggests that inter-organizational cooperation among the education, health, and agriculture should be necessary for child health programs both at national and local level (Bardack 1998).

In March 2004, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, Science and Technology (MEXT) submitted a bill to the Diet to establish a position of "nutrition teacher" who can teach diet and nutrition in public schools. The School Education Act was amended in June 2004 and the nutrition teachers are to be introduced from the April 2005. On the other hand, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery has launched some programs for "local products for local consumption (*Chisan Chisho*)" to support "farm to school" actions. At local level, as mentioned above, a variety of collaborations are proliferating across Japan. However, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of General Affairs and Communications compel further reduction of public spending on school meal program. Some local political managers welcome NPM type reform measures for "bureaucracy bashing."

Public service is at the crossroads. Alternative service delivery has become popular among advanced capitalist countries, due to the criticism on inefficient bureaucratic activities. More taxpayers welcome public choice philosophy which compels competition among the service providers. However, as shown in the upsurge of juvenile delinquency, environmental change, and other uncertainties like terrorism, the people will require more positive role of government. To make government function and respond to such demands, it is decisively important for government to recover the trust and confidence of community members. The age of bureaucratic, welfare state is over. The Weberian public service is in the moribund, too. Fifty years ago, Akira Kurosawa, a Japanese cinema director, described a life of old public servant who devoted his life for the community development in his film "*Ikiru* (To Live)." It reminds us the public spiritedness, or priceless efforts of civil service for the public interest should be the foundation of public administration, regardless of time change. In this context, school lunch program seems a relatively small public program, but could be a laboratory of future public service in Japan and other countries.

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## Note

- 1) The term liberalization of the school ward means the leverage to choose school for wards by parents without compulsion by the board of education to make choice for them.

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