

Ottawa Newsletter, Issue 38, June 2025

The Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School—Dreaming big like the vast Canadian landscape...

Introduction

Hello to everyone at the Canada-Japan Society and to all those who support Japan-Canada relations.

Even in Ottawa, one of the coldest capitals in the world, spring has finally arrived, albeit late. Before we could fully enjoy the blooming spring, we are already enveloped in the warmth of early summer. Just over a month ago, the nearby Rockcliffe Park was covered in snow, but now it is ablaze with vibrant greenery. As I enjoy the changing seasons, I realize that it has already been three years since I arrived in Ottawa. Time truly flies. This is the 38th installment of this series.

This time, I would like to introduce the Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School.

Maintaining and strengthening close ties with the local Japanese community in Ottawa is one of the most important tasks of the embassy. Schools, especially elementary and junior high schools, are at the core of any community, no matter where in the world. Not only students but also their families are involved in various ways. Similarly, the Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School is an important hub for the local Japanese community. In fact, many embassy staff members send their children to the Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School. I also attend events such as the entrance ceremony, sports day, cultural festival, and graduation ceremony whenever my schedule permits.

What I have come to realize is that the Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School is not only a place of learning for students, but also an invaluable diplomatic asset for the Embassy of Japan in terms of fostering future Japanophiles and promoting Japanese culture in the local community.

With that in mind, let's start with the history of the Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School.



© Embassy of Japan in Canada (Entrance Ceremony)

Origin

The Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School was established in 1993. Prior to that, there were no schools in Ottawa that taught Japanese using Japanese textbooks. Ottawa, the capital city, was once a small village known as "Bytown," a hub for the lumber business.

The name "Ottawa" comes from the Algonquin word "adawe," meaning "traders." In 1857, it became the capital of the British North American colony, and later developed into the capital of the Dominion of Canada and then the capital of Canada as we know it today. However, compared to major urban areas such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal, Ottawa has a small population and no prominent industries such as manufacturing. In short, it is a political city. For this reason, the number of Japanese residents in the Ottawa area has also been limited.

Over the years, there has been a desire among Japanese residents in Ottawa to establish a Japanese school. However, due to the lack of Japanese companies in Ottawa, there are no organizations such as a chamber of commerce or a Japanese association to serve as a foundation for such an initiative, making the establishment of a Japanese school challenging.

Additionally, among Japanese embassy staff members who had brought their school-age children with them, the priority was to acclimate them to the local education system, so the establishment of a supplementary school was not a top priority. However, a turning point came in 1993. Mr. Yasuo Matsui, minister of the Japanese Embassy, raised the issue to break the deadlock.

He argued that "Ottawa also needs an educational facility where children can smoothly adapt to Japanese schools in terms of learning, culture, and etiquette when they return to Japan, and that a Japanese school should be established." Under the leadership of Minister Matsui, Consul Sakunaga of the Consular Section of the Embassy took the lead, with the support of Counselor Katsuyasu Suzuki, and the School Establishment Preparatory Committee was launched in July 1993. The Preparatory Committee for the Establishment of the School worked quickly to make practical preparations for the opening of the Hoshuko Japanese school. The operational structure of the Hoshuko Japanese school was established with the full cooperation of the Montreal Hoshuko School Inc., which served as a model. The Japanese School in Toronto and Washington, D.C. also provided various relevant information. School rules were also established.

On Saturday, November 6, 1993, the opening ceremony of the Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School was held. The school building was borrowed from two classrooms at Rideau High School. There were two classes, one for lower grades (first, second, and third grades) and one for upper grades (fourth, fifth, and sixth grades). The total number of students was 14. There were two full-time teachers, Mr. Kanda and Mr. Nakahara, and two volunteer teachers, Mrs. Aoki, the wife of the embassy secretary, and Mrs. Matsui, the wife of the minister. The subjects taught were Japanese and mathematics. The honorary principal was Minister Matsui, and the chairman of the board of directors and principal was Mr. Yasushi Mitani.

The "Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School Handbook" describes the history of the school's establishment. It states, "Although it was a very small school, it was the start of a Japanese school supported by the

enthusiasm of its founders, parents, and teachers.” I think the pride of those involved in the Hoshuko Japanese school shines through in this very straightforward description.

The present state of the Hoshuko Japanese school - Anthology “Trajectory”

The Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School, which began as a “very small school,” has now developed into a respectable school. Due to an increase in the number of students and the scale of the budget, as well as the need to clarify tax issues and responsibilities in the event of accidents, the school was incorporated as a nonprofit organization in September 2018.

As of April 2025, there are 78 students in nine classes from first grade to ninth grade. The Operations Committee consists of nine members, including the Operations Committee Chair, the Principal, and the Vice Principal. The Consular Section Chief of the Embassy also participates as a special committee member. There are nine locally hired teachers who teach two subjects—Japanese and mathematics—based on Japanese textbooks from 9:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on Saturdays.

As with anything else, education is not something that yields visible results overnight. It is through daily accumulation and consistent effort over many years that results gradually begin to emerge. Of course, the outcomes of education are closely tied to students' lives and cannot be easily quantified, but I would like to share one example.

Every spring, the Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School publishes an anthology titled “Trajectories.” This anthology features essays written by all students from first grade through ninth grade. I recently received the 2024 edition. As I flipped through it, I couldn't help but reflect on what I was like when I was in elementary and middle school. It gives me a sense of how the students are striving to live their lives to the fullest.

The anthology also includes reports on awards won in various literary competitions. For example, in the 2024 “National Children's Talent Development Contest,” out of 6,795 entries, H.M., a third-grade student at the Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School, won the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Award in the essay category for her piece titled “Your Future Is in My Hands.”

Additionally, the 2024 “Overseas Japanese Children's Literary Works Competition” saw participation from 217 Japanese-related schools located in various countries. Among these, only 20 schools received the “School Award,” and the Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School was one of them. Out of 29,820 total submissions, 501 works were selected for awards, with 213 submissions from the Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School resulting in 14 works being selected. This is an outstanding achievement.



© Embassy of Japan in Canada

Impressions of visiting Hoshuko Japanese school

As mentioned at the beginning, I have visited the Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese school on various occasions, including entrance and graduation ceremonies. Each time I visit, I discover something new and am moved by the students, parents, and teachers who gather at the Hoshuko Japanese school. I truly feel that these are wonderful schools. I would like to share some of my personal impressions.

〈School song〉

At events such as the entrance and graduation ceremonies, where I am invited to attend, the school song is always sung. Every time I hear it, I am impressed by the beautiful lyrics and melody. It is also nice that the students accompany the song on the piano and violin. Since this is a special occasion, I will include the lyrics here.

1 Like the vast land of Canada
We learn with dreams in our hearts
We go forward today with hope
To connect Japan and Canada
Ah, we are Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School

2 Like the history of the Rideau Canal
Let us build our future

Nurturing friendship, we go forward today
Holding hands and smiling
Ah, we are Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School

3 Like the rich greenery of Gatineau
Our future stretches out infinitely
With pride, we go forward tomorrow.

To connect Japan and Canada
Ah, we are Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School

The school song of Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School was created in 2007 (Heisei 19). The lyrics were collected from students, refined by a group of parents, and edited by teachers. The music was composed by Ms. Yukiko Koga, a parent.

When all the students, teachers, the school committee, parents, and guests sing it at ceremonies, a sense of unity is born. That is why I decided to feature the Hoshuko Japanese school in this issue of "Ottawa News."



© Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School

〈Sports Day〉

I finished writing this article on Saturday night, May 31, Ottawa time, which was the day of the Hoshuko Japanese school's sports day. Due to thunderstorms the previous day, there were concerns about

postponement, but the weather held up. This demonstrated the principal's decision-making and the unity of the Hoshuko Japanese school. This year, after the opening remarks, everyone performed radio calisthenics together. It was impressive to see all the students from first grade to ninth grade, along with teachers, family members, and guests, spread out across the entire field to do radio calisthenics. Then, the students were divided into red and white teams, and various events were held.

What was truly moving was that the program was carefully planned to ensure the safety and health of the students while also allowing everyone, including their families, to enjoy the events. Moreover, all the equipment for events such as the centipede race, obstacle course, dorayaki eating contest, and ball toss was handmade by the organizing committee and parents. The meticulous preparation was truly impressive. The sports day was filled with excitement and color, with the laughter and cheers of the students and their families, and I realized that it was all thanks to the passion of the parents and the organizing committee.



© Embassy of Japan in Canada

〈Homework〉

There is a word that I hear frequently whenever I visit the Hoshuko Japanese school. That word is “homework.” Homework plays a very important role in the life of a Hoshuko Japanese school student. This is because actual classes are only held on Saturdays, so from the perspective of completing the Japanese textbooks, it is important to study at home from Monday to Friday. That said, it is difficult for students who do homework to keep up with both their local schoolwork and Hoshuko Japanese school homework. Nevertheless, it is a great opportunity for students to train their minds, so although it is hard work, they gain a lot from it.

What I would like to emphasize here is the commitment of the teachers who prepare the homework. As educators, their dedication to helping students reach their full potential is truly admirable.

Additionally, one more thing that left a strong impression regarding homework was the graduation speech given by the student representative at the graduation ceremony. "The weekly homework was tough, and there were times when I wanted to give up and even cried while doing it. But looking back now, I'm glad I persevered. I know the teachers must have worked hard to create the assignments. Thank you so much. And to all the current students, homework will help you in the future, so please persevere. You will realize this when you graduate." I will never forget the way he spoke in his own words.

〈Graduates' overflowing love for their alma mater〉

The Hoshuko Japanese school only goes up to the third year of junior high school, so when students advance to high school, they no longer attend the Hoshuko Japanese school. Even so, every year, several graduates volunteer to support the supplementary school. Despite their busy schedules with high school classes and club activities, they spend their precious weekends at the Hoshuko Japanese school every Saturday, helping students with their studies and assisting teachers. They do this voluntarily, without being forced by anyone.

The reason behind this seems to be the deep sense that the Hoshuko Japanese school had a significant impact on their personal development. Attending the local school from Monday to Friday and then going to the supplementary school on Saturdays to complete a massive amount of homework is by no means easy. They memorize kanji while crying and learn math that is far more advanced than what they learn at their local schools. By the time they graduate, they come to understand the significance of the mental strength and intellectual abilities they have unknowingly developed. Some graduates then wish for their juniors to persevere and complete the Hoshuko Japanese school without giving up.

Some students spend nine years at the supplementary school. Their attachment to the school is unparalleled.

The Future of the Hoshuko Japanese School

It has been 32 years since the Hoshuko Japanese school was established in 1993. During this time, the number of students and teachers has grown significantly, and the educational content has also developed greatly. This is the result of the relentless efforts of those involved in the Hoshuko Japanese school. I would like to express my heartfelt respect and gratitude once again to our predecessors who established the Hoshuko Japanese school under difficult circumstances.

The passion and vision of our predecessors who were involved in the establishment of the school, combined with the dedication of the teachers, the efforts of the board of directors, and the selfless support of the parents, have borne fruit, and I believe that an even brighter future awaits the Ottawa Hoshuko Japanese School. This is because Japanese culture is now widely accepted, deeply loved, and highly valued in Canadian society. This includes anime, Japanese cuisine, martial arts such as judo, kendo, and karate, as well as ikebana and tea ceremony, among others, and is enjoyed by people of all ages and genders. Last year, the number of Canadians visiting Japan reached 580,000, the highest number ever, including pre-COVID-19 levels. This year, the number is expected to exceed that figure. Interest in

Japanese culture is directly linked to interest in the Japanese language. In this sense, the significance of a supplementary school specializing in Japanese language education in Ottawa, the capital of Canada, is particularly noteworthy.

Moreover, today's world is increasingly globalized across all fields. While the vulnerabilities of global supply chains have sparked discussions on economic security, a closer look at the realities of politics, economics, business, academia, education, sports, and the arts reveals that very few things can be self-sufficient within Japan. In short, international talent is essential. The role of Hoshuko Japanese schools in cultivating such talent is growing ever more important.

From this perspective, the diversity of students at Hoshuko Japanese schools is particularly noteworthy. Regardless of nationality or lineage, students who are able to keep up with Japanese language classes, complete a large amount of homework, and actively participate in various school events gather here. The Hoshuko Japanese school is expected to open the future for their students and, in turn, contribute greatly to the friendship and goodwill between Japan and Canada. For example, this summer, the Ottawa Arts High School Orchestra will visit Japan for about a month to perform in various locations and participate in an exchange program. Among the members of the orchestra are graduates of the Hoshuko Japanese school.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, Hoshuko Japanese schools are of great significance, and considering the historical background of its establishment by our predecessors, we are confident that the Embassy must provide as much support as possible.

It may not be long before graduates emerge as leaders in Japan, Canada, or the international community.
(End)