Chapter 2 Policies by Age Group
◆ Section 1 Infancy ◆

(Ensuring and promoting the health of mother and child)

- Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare promoted the intensification / focus on medical resources like public hospitals in areas where there is a shortage of pediatricians / obstetricians and told the prefectures to consider measures to achieve the goal. In the medical treatment fee revision (fiscal year 2008), pediatric care was focused on by raising the hospital charges children’s hospitals where staff is sufficient or raising medical charges when medical care is provided at night or on holidays, in coordination with local medical institutions.

(Better Support for child-rearing)

- December 2007, Based on the “Work Life Balance Charter” and guidelines approved by the government labour management in December 2007, the government has been promoting various policies aiming at achieving a society where “each and every person is satisfied with their work and fulfills the responsibilities for the job and there are various options available to opt for diversifed life style in different stages of life such as child-rearing or in old age / middle age.

The Cabinet Office aiming at “Change Japan” through “Change Work Style”, has selected a frog as the symbol character, which looks familiar (“frog” and “change” sound the same in Japanese). And using this symbol character the national movement “Change! Japan Campaign” is being implemented, getting the public in various fields and regions involved.

- After the number of the waiting list for day care facility centers and kindergarten was reached at its peak in 2003, it has decreased for last 4 years consecutively. As of April 1, 2007, the number of children in the waiting list was 18,000, but potential demand for day care facilities and kindergarten is rising along with admission capacity increase in day care facilities. For 4 years from 2003, the capacity of day care facilities increased by 114,000, while the number waiting decreased by 8,000. This made it clear that more mid- and long-term policies should be deployed to cope up with the potential demand arising due to increasing people opting for employment.

In the light of this background, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare with an aim “to make the number waiting for day care facilities and kindergartens zero, and ensuring the services where all the working people can safely leave their children with and go to work“, developed “New Zero Waiting List Strategy” for enhancing and promoting the quality and quantity of day care policies.

By next 10 years, the target is set to increase provision proportion of day care service provision (children aged 3 or under) from 20% to 38% and proportion of after-school day care clubs provision (1st grade to 3rd grade elementary school children) from 19% to 60%. Especially for the 3 years from 2008 to 2010 the initiative will be promoted as the focal period to achieve the target.

Further, as of April 1, 2008, the number waiting for day care facilities and kindergarten increased to 19,550 for the first time in 5 years.

- Based on the “Children and Childrearing Support Plan” and “New Measures for Declining Birthrate”, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, is expanding the local child-rearing support bases for fiscal year 2007, by revising the existing gathering space project and child-rearing support center project, establishing a regional child-rearing base
project through utilizing children’s centers and promoting 6,000 facilities ahead of schedule, which is originally planed in “Children and Childrearing Support Plan” for fiscal year 2009.

Specifically, The Ministry is promoting establishment of a local child-rearing support base project (center type) to provide consultation at day care facilities to full-time housewives regarding child rearing problems or conduct activities in the community and a local child-rearing support base project (space type) to establish a standing space to enable people casually get together by make the use of public facilities, vacant stores in local shopping areas, private houses, etc. (Fiscal year 2007: 4,409 places (“center type”: 3,478, “space type”: 903 and “children’s center type”: 28 )

(Better quality of child care and education in day-care centers and kindergartens)
- Since October 2006, special measures have been taken by establishing a mechanism to authorize day-care centers and kindergartens with capabilities to provide education and child care to pre-school children and with support capabilities to providing supporting child-rearing practice locally by prefectures as “Centre for early childhood education and care” (As of April 1, 2008, 229 authorized centers).

According to the survey regarding the Centre for early childhood education and care system, conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in March 2008, nearly 80% of the guardians who used the facilities and more than 90% Centre for early childhood education and care facilities appreciate the system.

The authorized facilities mentioned that authorization advantages are that they can enhance supporting child-rearing practice activities and accept children whether their mothers work or not. On the other hand, the operational problems are also raised by facilities and local public organizations.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare will work together to improve the system operation so that the system will be more actively utilized and the Centre for early childhood education and care system revision will be concluded during fiscal year 2008.

◆Section 2 Elementary School Phase◆

(Securing and promoting health)
- The “School Health Law” (1958 Act 56) was revised in June 2008, which made it possible to provide health guidance by nursing teachers in coordination with other related teachers and enhance school healthcare in coordination with local medical institutions. Also from 2008, the measures are promoted for better school health education by implementing “a comprehensive coordination project with local specialists to protect health of children” to send specialist physicians to schools and promote health education in school.

- According to the general provisions of the course of study revised in March 2008, “promotion of school shokuiku” was specified clearly and curriculum contents of subjects related to shokuiku were enhanced from the point of view of shokuiku.

- In June 2008, the “School Lunch Act” (1954 Act160) was revised, and the aim of “Promotion of school shokuiku” was mentioned clearly. At the same time, the following was set forth; diet and nutrition teachers should give instructions about diet utilizing school lunch, local products should be used for school lunch to promote the instructions by the teachers, and school principals should create a comprehensive plan for instructions about diet.

(Developing skills for daily life)
- The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, will create a manual and case studies to address "cyber bullying" and provide them to all education committees, elementary schools, junior high schools and senior high schools all over Japan, based on the "summary of advisory committee to build a system for protecting and fostering children (secondary)" complied In June 2008.

(Developing academic abilities)
- The elementary school courses of study were revised in March 2008 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.
The main purposes are the following:

1) Nurturing the "Surviving Capability" based upon the education principles clarified in the revised Fundamental Law of Education.

2) Emphasizing the balance of gaining knowledge & skills and developing the ability to think, judge and express

3) Developing healthy spirit and body by improving moral education and physical education

(Ensuring opportunities for activities that lead to accomplishment of social independence)

- To promote reading activities of children, in December 2001, "Law on the Promotion of Reading Activities for Children" (2001 Act 154) was enacted and enforced. And based on this law, a new "Basic Plan for the Promotion of Reading Activities for Children" (Secondary Plan) was endorsed by the cabinet in March 2008. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, according to the plan, is implementing promotional activities in coordination with the families, local authorities and schools which would create suitable environment to nurture the reading habits in children. The Ministry is also improving school libraries and public libraries by developing librarian teachers and creating and distributing leaflets as well as promoting measures to send volunteers to the community to read books.

Furthermore, The Ministry is implementing measures to create and deliver "Family Education Handbook" which specifies importance of reading books to children at home.

- From fiscal year 2008, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in coordination with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, is promoting "Children's Rural Exchange Project" where elementary school children will be staying in rural areas for 1 week long having practical experience. And in all the prefectures and cities, for expansion of regions for the project, a model region is selected to accept the stay for the project and efforts for proper implementation of the project are executed. In addition, information exchange system will be improved for coordination between the rural areas and the elementary schools.

Section 3 Early Adolescence

(Developing Occupational skills and motivation)

- The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, from 2007, in co-operation with the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and from 2008, in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, has been implementing "Local Industrial Leader Development Project" where vocational high schools and local production industries work together to support an organization to develop professionals engaged in manufacturing locally, food and lifestyle industries.

- From 2005 for 3 years, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) implemented "local-oriented and private section involved career education project" in order to assist young people to better understand significance of working and fun to work from an early stage like elementary, junior high and high school age.

During fiscal year 2007, the career education was implemented in two areas in the country, targeting about 40,000 students in about 300 schools, "Career Education Guide Book ", with all the know-how information put together was published.

In fiscal year 2008, to further put the expertise into practice, a system (Training programs for coordinators, etc) to develop and evaluate coordinators will be demonstrated.

- To accelerate and enhance the initiative to promote career education, etc, in the "Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education" endorsed by the cabinet of July 2008, promoting career education was included as the measures which are to be implemented for the next five years.

Section 4 Youth Phase

(Enhancement of University Education)

- The Upper Secondary School Equivalency Examination was revised from The University Entrance Qualification Examination that certifies the equivalent academic ability as upper secondary school graduates in January 2005. From 2007, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, The Upper Secondary School Equivalency Examination was carried
out for desired applicants of the correctional institutions (penal institutions and juvenile training schools) in the total number of 133 institutions throughout the country with approximately 388 examinees.

(Enhancement of Occupational capabilities and employment support)

- The Ministry of Economy, has defined the skills or abilities recognized in the workplace or in the society as "Basic strength of the human being as a part of the society", ("Strengths to move forward in life", "Skills to think through problems", "Skill to work in a team)" and activities promoting the development and evaluation of these skills are been implemented.. In 2007, in the seven model universities, the sessions for developing and evaluating the basic strength as a human being and part of the society were executed through the practical education of solving some problems provided by the industries, and all the know how put together was published as a "reference book".

In 2008, in the nine model universities, an educational model structure that develops students' basic strength of living in the society in through various subjects from the time they enter university until they graduate.

- The Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare, for job-hopping part-timers who did not had the opportunities to build occupational capabilities, to develop and enhance the capabilities so that they can have a stable employment, in April 2008, "Job Card Regulation", (through meticulous career consulting, awareness, clarification of the issues were done and by combining classroom lectures and company training, occupational training provided. Job history and evaluation results from the companies were summarized in a "job card" that can be used in employment search activities).