

FACT SHEET

In a traditional Japanese home, one does not sleep on a bed. You sleep on the floor using cushions (*futon*). The floors are made of *tatami* (straw mats), so the floor is not hard. When you wake up, you fold up your bed and put it in a specially made-to-fit closet. Most students eat a quick breakfast of toasted bread; and most do not pack their own lunches but eat school lunches of their choice. Nowadays, most elementary students do not wear uniforms, but junior and high students are required to wear them, usually white tops and dark bottoms. Each school has a distinct uniform that makes the students easily identifiable to the public.

There are few school busses for transportation to school. Most students walk or ride bikes, and some even have to ride trains. It is not unusual for a student to spend two or more hours each day getting to school. Schools usually begin about 8:30, but in rural areas the times can change, depending on the season, school usually ends about 3:00.

The Japanese school year begins in April with three terms, separated by short holidays in spring and winter, and one month long summer break. Almost all children attend elementary school, and less than 1% attend private schools. After junior high students must take a standardized entrance examination to determine what high school they will attend. Japanese students spend 240 days a year at school, about 60 days more than American students. They attend school for half a day on Saturdays. Typically they take the following subjects: mathematics, social studies, Japanese, science, and English. They also take physical education, music, art, and moral studies, with very few electives. After school, there are extracurricular clubs that students may attend, either sports or cultural in nature. Students spend an average of 2 hours per weekday on homework and 3 hours on Sundays.

When students arrive at school, they put their shoes in a locker and don school slippers. They assemble in their homeroom classes, about 40-45 students per classroom. Students do not change classrooms; rather, the teachers move from room to room. Only for physical education, lab classes, or subjects requiring special facilities do students meet in other parts of the school.

Some schools have cafeterias, but most do not. Students usually eat with friends in their homeroom classrooms. In the upper grades, students usually bring lunch from home, consisting of rice, fish, eggs, vegetables, and pickles.

Something very unusual about Japanese schools takes place at the end of the school day. All students participate in “*o soji*,” or the cleaning of the school. They sweep the classrooms and hallways, empty trash cans, clean restrooms, chalkboards and erasers, and pick up trash from around the building.

Approximately 60% of high school students leave school at the end of the day to attend “cram schools” or “*juku*” for supplemental lessons. Students can take both academic and non-academic subjects to be better prepared for the university entrance exams. How well students do on the entrance exams will determine what university he/she can attend, so students want to be very well prepared.