

Email Newsletter from Mayor of Okayama City (67) May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016 Issue

【The shock by the fact that 729 children are on waiting list to enter day care centers or nursery schools】

Hello, I'm Mr. Omori, Mayor of Okayama.

As of April 1<sup>st</sup> of this year, presently in Okayama city, the number of children not accepted to day care centers or nursery schools who were hoping to enter these institutions, and others numbered 1,343. The numbers of children on waiting lists is 729. These are the highest recorded numbers to date.

By April 2014, half a year had passed since my inauguration as mayor. At that time, the number of children not accepted to day care centers or nursery schools stood at 772 and the number of children on waiting lists was 0. During the last 2 years, we have put effort further on ensuring more institutions, which 937 children can enter to solve the problem.

Even though we have put a lot of effort into this problem, I was shocked that the number of children who still can not enter these institutions has dramatically increased as opposed to my expectation.

Before deciding a new policy in Okayama City to help resolve this problem, I thought that we should look at not only the numbers but also the cause of the problem. After inquiring to those in charge of fixing this problem for a breakdown of the 1,343 children who were not accepted to a day care centers or nursery schools, one factor which stood out was discovered.

The fact is that all this time, even though there are nursery schools available within a 30 minute drive from one's home, Okayama city interpreted those children as not children on a waiting list. In Okayama city's case, if people living in the middle of the city were willing to drive for 30 minutes, they could find nursery schools for their child to enter.

Yet, it is not realistic to ask parents or guardians to drive such distances. I have to say that this policy is far removed from the everyday lives of ordinary citizens.

From now on, Okayama city includes "Children who could not enter those institutions in spite of adjusting the entrance from the first to the third choices" as children on waiting list without exception. I think this is the true citizens' feelings.

The reexamination of the definition of children on waiting list resulted in 729 children. It revealed nothing but concrete number which we should consider for our policy objective.

First of all, Okayama City is aiming to secure institutions which more than 800 children can enter. We will do it especially focusing on the areas with few institutions until April next year. Also, it is not enough to just secure the number of nurseries in order to solve the problem. We are thinking of improving the environment of all citizens' child care as much as possible by working on securing enough nursery school teachers and to lighten economic defrayment of households bringing up children.

Furthermore, surely the increase of double-income households has influenced the cause of rapid increase of entrance applications in recent years. During last 2 years, more than 1,000 people newly applied to nursery schools. We consider that the main factor for the rapid increase shows wider recognition to Okayama City's policy to improve child care environment. Therefore the policy encouraged more citizens to work and it increased demands of more nursery schools.

In Okayama city, we will continuously try to comprehend citizen's needs through questionnaires and others and to meet the expectations of all the citizens from now on.

"To err and not change one's ways, this is what it is to err" is a phrase from Analects which means the real mistake is not to correct a mistake even knowing when there is a mistake.

The definition in the past might not be a "mistake", but it is certain that it is far from the actual condition of citizen's everyday lives.

In Okayama city, we will do the best on more improvement of nursery environment by reexamination of children on waiting list with the spirit of Analects from now on. Thus I request all citizens to understand Okayama City's review and support for making better child bearing environment.