



AATJ

Japanese Programs S.O.S.



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日付 AUGUST 2021

CURRENT CHALLENGES IN JAPANESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Maintaining healthy programs and retaining and recruiting teachers has been a concern for the past several years, and not just in Japanese language education. According to data gathered by the U.S. government, teachers' unions, numerous education policy think tanks, and media outlets, the need for teachers is now far exceeding the supply. In Japanese, we have seen the teacher shortage coming for a while, with retirements increasing at the same time the pool of new teachers to replace them has become smaller and smaller. Recent job postings have gone unfilled for long periods of time, placing survival of long-standing Japanese programs in danger.

This situation was already worrisome, but the challenges of the pandemic have led many Japanese teachers to retire earlier than they planned. It has also created financial burdens for schools that have led some schools, both K-12 and college, to begin reducing or phasing out Japanese language programs or to consider doing so in the future.

WHAT CAN WE DO? S.O.S!

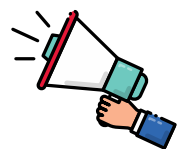
To address these challenges effectively, **advocacy and support must begin early with pro-active measures for ALL programs**. By the time a teacher has sent the SOS distress call to AATJ and JFLA, a program may have passed the point of no return. But by approaching the problem in a more holistic way and rethinking what we mean by "SOS", we can save more programs. So what do we mean by that?

S IS FOR (PRO-ACTIVE) STRATEGIES

You may be a dedicated, skilled teacher, but if no one outside of your classroom knows that, your program may not survive through tough times. **Quality is important, but so is marketing**. Japanese is almost always a choice, and your program needs to be good...better than the other choices. So always be thinking of how to share good news. Don't wait until you're in trouble. In addition to kuchikomi, there are some things you have to consider as part of the regular job of a Japanese teacher such as maintaining a high profile so that people know about the great things going on in your program. Notice, I didn't say "classroom". Your Japanese program is more than your classroom (virtual or in-person). It is all of the experiences that students gain from taking Japanese from you. It's also very important to be involved outside of Japanese, so that not only is your program vital to the school, but so are YOU!

HOW TO MAINTAIN A HIGH PROFILE (JUST A FEW EXAMPLES)

- Publish a newsletter and make sure to share it w/parents, community, school administrators
- Create a website for your program (or have a student do it) and keep it updated
- Social media (Instagram, etc.) account for your Nihongo Program
- Be involved outside of your program
- Maintain communication with senpai of your program
- Toot your program's horn! About cultural events, activities, exchanges, JNHS, etc.
- Bring the community in, take the program out to the community



TYPES OF EVIDENCE

At the same time, make sure that you're **collecting evidence**. That can be as simple as just dropping evidence such as complimentary emails, news articles, school bulletin announcements, and photos of class activities and events, into a google folder. Information about how and when the program started should go into the folder. If you don't know, then now is the time to start finding out. All of this evidence is very helpful if you suddenly need a support letter from JFLA or AATJ. We can write a much stronger letter very quickly if we can cite specific details of your program.

- Program history
- Enrollment data
- Student/parent surveys
- Program accolades
- Media mentions
- Photos
- Involvement in JNHS



S IS FOR (PRO-ACTIVE) RETIREMENT STRATEGIES

If retirement is in your near future (5 or fewer years away), start planning now. It's really important to be actively engaged in finding your replacement so that the program you lovingly built can continue to thrive. Use your network of local AATJ affiliate colleagues, JET alum, former students, and others. You're now not only a teacher and marketing specialist, you'll have to become an HR director. When I knew that I would be retiring "in a few years", even before I had made a final decision, I tapped into my own local network of Japanese teachers and let them know that I was thinking of retiring. The program the next teacher would inherit was strong, with a high profile, so it was stable and appealing enough to attract interest. If you are isolated and without a local network, reach out to neighboring affiliates.



O IS FOR OPPORTUNITIES

Seek out opportunities, recognize them, value, and nurture them. Most high school teachers of Japanese have heard their students say that **being in Japanese is like being in a family**. This may be true to some extent for college as well. Because a high school Japanese program usually only has one, maybe two teachers at a school, students experience something almost impossible in any other course of study-learning and growing together with the same group of students and the same teacher throughout all four years. No IB or AP exam can measure the value of this, but it's HUGE. And it is filling a social emotional need that is so critical for young people, particularly now. Remember that **you are not only building relationships with your students and they with each other, but your program is also building relationships**.



DON'T MISS OPPORTUNITIES TO:

- Build relationships with parents, community, fellow teachers, so that they become invested in the Nihongo program family
- Involve students/JNHS/Japan club members in building & promoting the Nihongo program brand
- Make your program accessible to ALL LEARNERS!
- Take advantage of JFLA grants, events, other opportunities and share this info with site/district admin
- Be the best teacher you can be by participating in ongoing professional development to keep your teaching engaging and current.

S IS ALSO FOR SUPPORT

It's important to recognize warning signs, to know whom and how to call for help. Some warning signs include:

- Trend of decline in enrollment
- Reduction of sections, even when interest and enrollment seem strong
- Not offering a Japanese 1 class, even temporarily



If any of these happen, or if something doesn't seem right, **be vocal. Ask questions, find out what's going on.** Is funding an issue? If so, look into applying for a JFLA program support grant. Be sure to give your local affiliate a heads up, so they can be ready to help, if needed.

The support stage is where having the backing of organizations like AATJ and JFLA matter. When teachers begin noticing signs of trouble, some are hesitant to speak out or ask for help. They may feel embarrassed or that the problem isn't really "bad enough". But the sooner you contact us, the sooner we can help you to act strategically and pro-actively.

A letter from AATJ and JFLA to your administration signals to the decision makers that **the eyes of a national organization are focused on their local Japanese program.** It helps shift their thinking about the program as being small and specialized to one that's part of a larger entity. It also makes it a little more difficult to operate in secret.



Why it matters:

- Signals that eyes of a national organization are watching
- Ability to mobilize, pull other sources of support together quickly (affiliate, JFLA, local/state language teachers organizations, JNHS, etc)

Support Flowchart

OTHER SOURCES OF SUPPORT LETTERS, EMAILS:

- Your local AATJ affiliate, local and state language teachers associations
- JNHS Officers, students
- Supportive parents
- Community partners

I hope you found this helpful. In future issues, we plan to feature SOS success stories and advice from individual teachers, as well as more strategies aimed at college programs. (This one was a bit more K-12 focused).