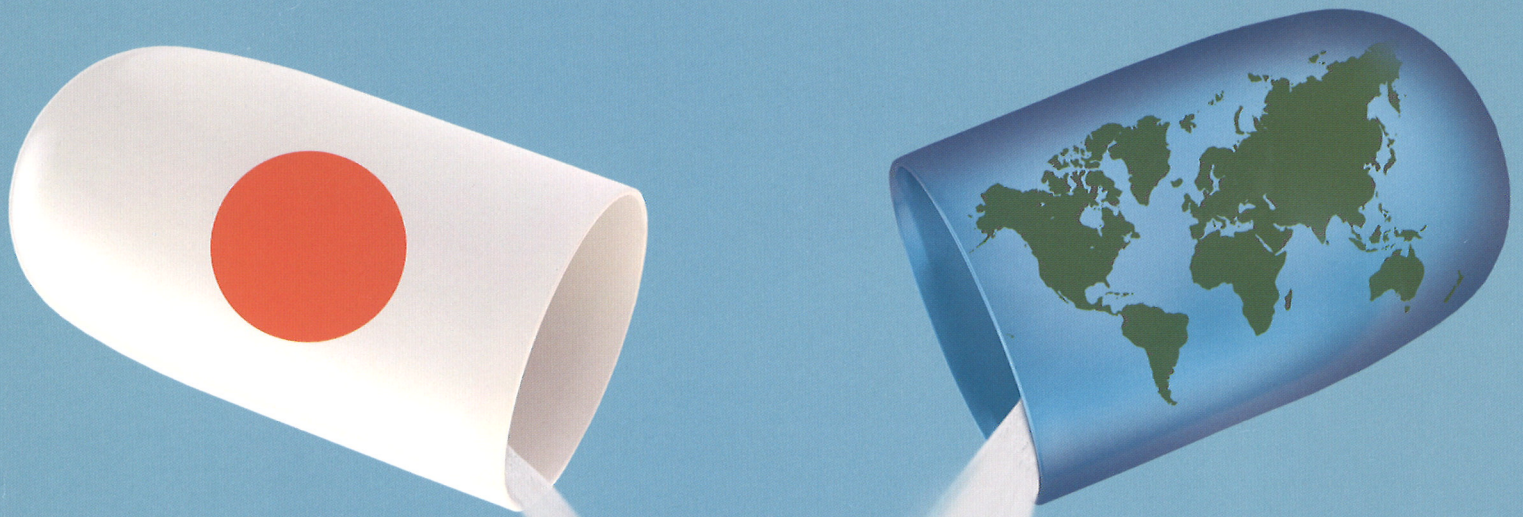


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# EXTRA CREDIT

International schools go beyond the core

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Ballet Club at Saint Maur International School

Academics still holds a prominent place in a child's schooling, and good grades are needed to access higher education and future employment. But, extracurricular activities also have a crucial role in a child's education.

is the international baccalaureate (IB), which includes a component called "creativity, activity, service" (CAS). This added dimension exposes children to wider activities that are important in forming well-rounded students.

In step with societal changes and child development research, curriculums have seen myriad changes over the past few decades. International schools are at the forefront of these changes, catering to a kaleidoscope of students.

International School. "The transition from being a great natural learner to being a learner within the constructed world often comes at a price to the former—natural learner dispositions are often damaged or suppressed by traditional education." This is why he believes that extracurricular activities are so important to a child's education.

In Japan, the IB curriculum is followed by many international schools, and extracurricular activities outside CAS are also greatly encouraged. Alternatively, The American School in Japan (ASIJ) provides a curriculum that is guided by US and internationally recognized curriculum standards, also allowing for a wealth of co-curricular activities spanning all grades, from Early Learning Center through high school.

## BALANCE

"We are all born as great natural learners," said Robert Thorn, secondary principal of Aoba-Japan

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Mathletics, Cricket and Cooking Club at Saint Maur International School

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## These extracurricular activities help students develop the right disposition and attitude toward learning



Elementary school tea ceremony at ASIJ's Japan Center.

The Osaka YMCA, an IB-accredited school, offers a range of clubs for different age groups. “Clubs are vitally important at all age levels,” explained John Murphy, principal at Osaka YMCA International School. “[Students] develop not only physically and mentally, but also have multiple opportunities to develop social and self-management skills, which are part of the IB program,” he added.

Areta Williams, interim head of school at The American School in Japan (ASIJ) told *The Journal*, that ASIJ’s co-curricular program provides more than 100 co-curricular activities to “engage students with their passions.” She added that these activities promote a “healthy, active lifestyle,” whilst the curriculum itself means a more flexible program allowing students the “opportunity to be self-directed in following their passions.”

On the other end of the spectrum, these activities simply offer solace from the pressures of work and school.

Timothy Matsumoto, secondary school principal at Saint Maur International School et École Française de Saint Maur, echoed this sentiment: “In the IB Full Diploma Program, extracurricular activities are not seen as extra but a necessary curricular aspect to counterbalance academic pressures, to gain valuable experience, and to apply knowledge and skills to various contexts.”

### EVERYDAY SKILLS

Personal development is not always found in a lesson and being part of extracurricular activities helps foster growth in both creative and social arenas.

Director of Admissions Rob Smailes, at the Canadian Academy in Kobe, highlighted the importance of extracurricular activities for self-discovery. The Canadian Academy has a broad extracurricular program

spanning elementary school, middle school, and high school. Activities in elementary school include sports, reading, cooking, crafts, young scientists, and writer’s workshops, as well as organizations such as the Boy Scouts and the Brownies.

The program changes once the students reach middle school, where “activities become more organized,” including team sports and service-orientated functions. This continues in high school with additions such as Model United Nations, Young Entrepreneurs’ Club, and service-oriented groups such as Animal Refuge, Tohoku Team, and Kansai International.

“Our students understand that they are in a position to make positive change in the lives of others,” Smailes said. Fostering this character trait “develops the whole child and enables them to see how they can help others,” he added.

Challenging students to step out of their comfort zone is another key driver behind extracurricular activities. “The children enjoy being challenged both physically and mentally,” the Osaka YMCA’s Murphy explained. Clubs offer children an opportunity to “interact with peers outside the regular classroom and promote flexibility, open-mindedness, creativity, risk-taking, and social skills—all of which are transferable to later life,” he added.

Not only do children savor the reward of progress, they enjoy the opportunity to find and cultivate passions. Matsumoto said, “Students can challenge themselves as much as they like, and enjoy progressing to the next level.”

Ultimately, these extracurricular activities help form attributes that enable young people to “function well in the constructed world,” said Aoba-Japan International School’s Thorn.

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ASIJ senior Britt Sease recently signed a national letter of intent to run track for the University of Arkansas.

## NEXT LEVEL

Looking ahead to tertiary education, Matsumoto explained that universities and colleges—particularly in the United States—are “interested in students’ commitment to and passion for the activities which they find most fulfilling.”

However, Thorn pointed out, “The importance of extracurricular activities in the college admissions process can be measured best by depth rather than by breadth: one or two activities in which the student is totally engaged, rather than a wide range of activities with only casual interest.”

In addition, these extracurricular activities help students develop the right disposition and attitude toward learning. Thorn says this means “university entrance and/or other pathways will take care

of themselves.” He added that joining these clubs and activities also provides “an insight into the applicant’s character, which cannot be expressed in grades or test scores.”

It’s a fact that one’s resume cannot simply be a list of grades and degrees. In modern society, employers look for more in young people. Introducing children to extra activities at a young age—and helping them find other passions—significantly adds to their ability to grow into the adult world.

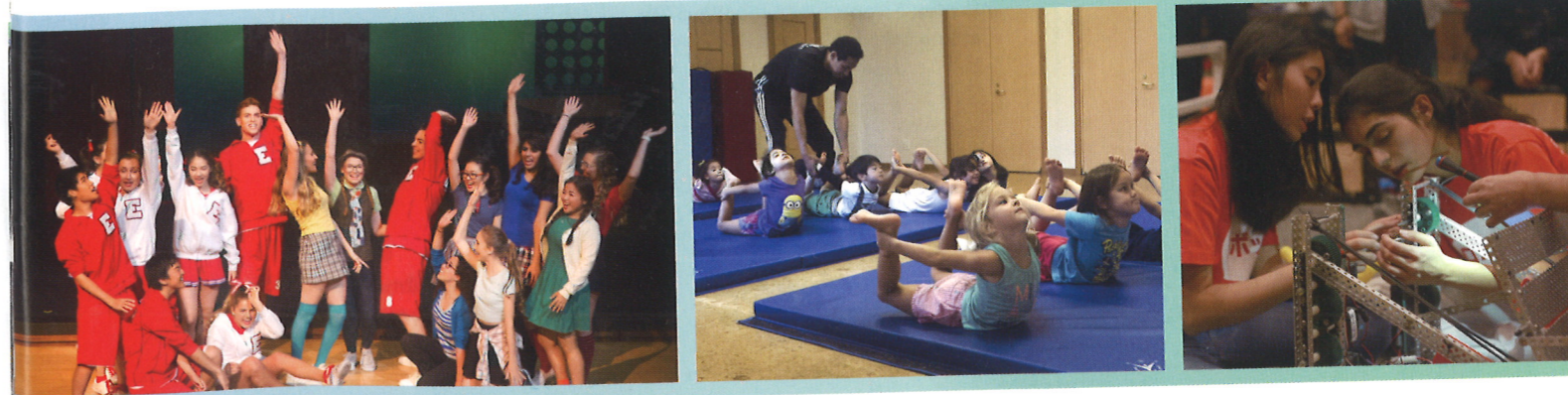
Sometimes it is extracurricular activities that enable students to pursue their talents. “Our student athletes regularly win both local and international competitions, with several graduates [having earned] athletic scholarships at the college level,” Williams explained.

As an example, the ASIJ News blog tells the story of student

Britt Sease, who will run track for the University of Arkansas in 2017. Beyond sports, other club activities have led students to pursuits later in life. “Ample opportunities for music, drama, and visual arts are also available at all age levels, and range from large-scale musicals, choir, orchestra, and jazz to intimate theater performances and movie making,” Williams said.

The balance is creating the kind of education that caters to the child as well as the wider world. In an increasingly globalized society, competition later in life is greater even though opportunities are wider. Allowing children to find their specific passions, as well as preparing them earlier in their schooling for later years—or as Thorn calls it, “an unknown future”—is the challenge that teachers and schools face. ■

Being part of extracurricular activities helps foster growth in both creative and social arenas.



ASIJ's annual VEX Robotics Competition, the spring musical, and gymnastics at ASIJ's Early Learning Center in Roppongi Hills



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