

An Analysis of the Intentions and Powers of Local Governments and Local Councils Regarding the Expansion of Private Correspondence High Schools*

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1. Introduction

1.1. Identifying the problem

The purpose of this paper is to reveal the intentions of local governments and local councils and how their authority is exercised with respect to the expansion of high schools with correspondence curricula (below, correspondence high schools), such as increasing the number of schools, increasing student capacity, and expanding student recruitment areas.

While the birth rate continues to fall and schools and students are declining in number, private correspondence high schools and their students have been trending upward in numbers since the late 1990s. Private correspondence high schools, as Teshima (2018) points out, have made their presence felt amid upper secondary educational institutions due to the changing nature of the students accepted as well as to changes in the law. Correspondence high schools often accept and educate students who find it difficult to enter high schools with full-day attendance curricula (below, full-time high schools). Given this context, they have been considered to play the role of a “safety net” within upper

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secondary education (Ito 2017). Previous research has also tended to focus on correspondence high schools and satellite facilities as “safety nets” (see Toki 2019 and Uchida 2016, for example). On the other hand, official regulation has been reinforced in recent years, such as the “Guidelines for Ensuring and Improving the Quality of High School Correspondence Education” formulated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (below, MEXT) in 2016 in response to the 2015 issue of fraudulently received tuition support funds and unsuitable educational content at Wits Aoyama Gakuen, as well as the repeated revisions of the Regulations on High School Correspondence Education.

As attention increases and regulations are simultaneously reinforced, what are the dynamics affecting the expansion of private correspondence high schools?

1.2. Examination of previous research

This section examines previous research on the increasing numbers and capacity adjustment of private high schools and correspondence high schools.

Kagawa et al. (2014) studied the increasing numbers of private high schools, while Kagawa & Liu (2016) examined capacity adjustment. The former depicts the postwar structure providing opportunities for high school education and clarifies the roles and characteristics of private high schools, while the latter discusses the capacity adjustment between private and public schools carried out by the public-private high school councils established in nearly every prefecture, as well as the limitations thereof due to the falling birth rate. These studies can account for full-time high schools among private schools, but not for the particular recent increase of private correspondence high schools.

Uchida et al. (2019) is a previous study significant to this paper with

regard to the handling of the increase in private correspondence high schools. This study analyzes the causes of the increase in correspondence high schools since the 1990s, identifying them as (1) school corporations planning to establish correspondence high schools indicate their intention thereby to accept students not suited to full-time high schools, thus receiving certification from private school councils on the basis that they will not be competing with existing high schools; (2) correspondence high schools determine their capacity differently from full-time high schools and high schools with part-time curricula (below, part-time high schools); and (3) the easing of school establishment requirements via the revised Correspondence Education Regulations is an institutional incentive that has had a positive influence on the increase in correspondence high schools since the 2000s. In addition, Sakai (2018) focuses on the increase in student numbers as well as school numbers due to the different attractions of private correspondence high schools in comparison to full-time high schools (the diversification of the education provided), while Minemura (2021) looks at the relationship of increasing school numbers to relaxed regulations and abolished barriers to entry, pointing out the effect of the commercialization of education on private correspondence high schools.

The studies above, including Uchida et al. (2019), have taken place in the area of educational sociology. Therefore, they mainly adopt a bird's-eye view approach of overall trends, without sufficient examination from the perspective of educational administration studies, which would analyze the mechanisms supporting the expansion of correspondence high schools in accordance with the authority and intent of specific actors. For example, Uchida et al. analyze the private schools councils, also addressed in this paper, but do not sufficiently consider what actual approval authority is possessed by these councils, or how other institutions with influence (the prefecture which is the recruitment area

or the municipality where the school is to be established), discernable in private school council minutes, act on the expansion of private correspondence schools.⁽¹⁾ Also, various discussions are likely to take place regarding concerns about school establishment and increased capacity, but these are likewise not sufficiently addressed. In addition, some school corporations in recent years have used closed school buildings provided by local governments to establish correspondence schools; in many cases these buildings are provided by municipalities rather than prefectures,⁽²⁾ a decision often made by the general administrative authorities or city assemblies, which are neither educational administration (boards of education) nor departments concerned with private education. In order to consider and comprehensively clarify the mechanisms of correspondence high school expansion, including the influence of general administrative authorities and assemblies, this paper includes in its analysis these bodies as distinct from private school-related departments as well.

Further, private correspondence high schools have been the focus of attention for their increasing numbers, with existing schools frequently expanded through changing regulations relating to capacity or recruitment area; previous research has likewise not addressed this issue sufficiently. Here, this paper defines everything including school establishment (increase in school numbers), capacity increase, and added recruitment areas as the “expansion of correspondence high schools.” It thereupon clarifies the question, left unaddressed by previous research on private (correspondence) high school increases and capacity adjustment, of what actors and institutions have shown what intent and been able to apply what authority to the expansion of correspondence high schools.

1.3. Research methods and analytical framework

The local governments analyzed by this paper include prefectures

where correspondence high schools are established and where they conduct education as well as the municipalities where the schools' headquarters are located. Municipalities are included for the following reason: as Konyuba (2019) shows, the structure of private school administration can be divided into the three levels of national government (MEXT), prefectures, and schools themselves; previous research analyzing private primary and secondary schools has focused on one or more of these levels. However, as noted above, in recent years some correspondence high schools have been established and operated via the provision of closed school buildings, etc. by municipalities. Further, the opinions of municipalities, confirmed by private school councils when private schools are being established, affect the screening. Nagano Prefecture, one of those addressed in this paper, requires a report from the municipal mayor to be submitted upon application to establish a school; the secretariat has made it clear in council meetings that they take this report very seriously. Other prefectural private school councils likewise have been confirmed to take seriously the opinions of municipalities where schools are to be established. Based on the above, this paper analyzes municipalities as well. Specifically, in addition to private school council minutes and screening materials, the analysis also addresses the minutes of prefectural and municipal assemblies where schools are established ("Assembly News" in cases where minutes are unreleased).

Also, in order to comprehend the actual authority possessed by private school councils, the paper focuses on whether their approval authority is considered bound or free. According to Ichikawa (2006), the approval conferred by administrative agencies upon the establishment of private schools includes "patent," "approval," and "permission" types; with regard to the use of approval authority within these categories as well, theories differ on whether it is bound, such that approval must be conferred if the standards are met, or if the administrative agencies

possess freedom to judge. The paper examines how private school councils understand and exercise their own approval authority.

Given the above, Section 2 clarifies the nature of private school councils and the reasons why correspondence high schools propose to increase capacity and add recruitment areas, based on organization of the screening results of private school councils throughout Japan and analysis of the minutes of private school councils from its example prefectures, Nagano, Ibaraki, and Okinawa (reasons discussed below). Next, based on private school council minutes and screening materials as well as prefectural assembly minutes from these three prefectures, Section 3 extracts statements indicating intent (positive or negative) with regard to the expansion of correspondence high schools and analyzes the intent and the potential authority therein. After that, Section 4 analyzes municipal intent and authority similarly, based on municipal assembly minutes in locations where private correspondence high schools have been established. Finally, the paper clarifies the intent and potential authority of prefectural and municipal administrations and assemblies with regard to the expansion of correspondence high schools.

The private school council minutes and screening materials for the three prefectures addressed here were gathered from materials disclosed on the prefectural websites and from requests for release of official documents. While some have been lost due to the regulations on storage periods of prefectural materials, 24 correspondence high schools established since 2000 were addressed (twelve in Nagano, nine in Ibaraki, and three in Okinawa). Also, seven of these schools (three in Nagano and two each in Ibaraki and Okinawa) used closed school buildings provided by municipalities. Prefectural and municipal assembly minutes were obtained from local government websites.⁽³⁾

In addition, in order to prevent identification of schools, the names of municipalities and committee/assembly members as well as specific

capacity figures, etc. have been omitted, with all municipalities (including towns and villages) identified as “A City” and so on.

1.4. electing case study prefectures

This paper uses prefectures where the expansion of correspondence high schools has made particular progress as case studies. Therefore, these prefectures were selected based on those with the highest numbers of private correspondence high schools and students thereof in the MEXT Basic School Survey.

Even among prefectures with large numbers of private correspondence high schools, when the number of full-time and part-time high school students is considered roughly equal to the prefectural high school age population, the number of schools is, as shown in Figure 1, especially high in proportion to the population in Nagano and Ibaraki Prefectures, highlighting them as prefectures where the expansion of correspondence high schools is making progress. A focus on the number of students at private correspondence high schools indicates that, as in Table 1,

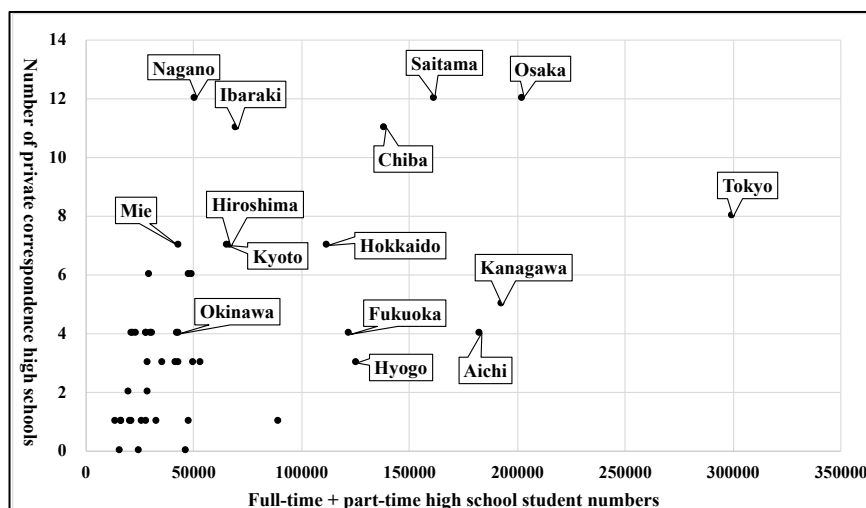


Figure 1. Distribution of number of private correspondence high schools and full-time + part-time high school student numbers as of 2022.

Source: Compiled by the author from the MEXT “School Basic Survey”

Table 1. Number of private correspondence high school students by prefecture in 2022 (Top 5 prefectures)

Prefecture	Number of private correspondence high school students
Ibaraki	24046
Okinawa	21891
Hokkaido	19833
Osaka	15034
Kagoshima	10881

Source: Compiled by the author from the MEXT “School Basic Survey”

numerous students are enrolled at schools of this kind in Ibaraki and Okinawa Prefectures.

Based on the above, this paper adopts Nagano, Ibaraki, and Okinawa Prefectures for analysis as case studies where the expansion of correspondence high schools is making particular progress.

2. The nature of private school councils and the reasons why correspondence high schools plan to increase capacity, etc.

2.1. The basic nature of private school councils

Private school councils are institutions which can make representations to prefectural governors with regard to important matters concerning private schools; Article 9 of the Private Schools Act states that they are to be established in each prefecture. Specifically, the governor poses questions to the private school council about school establishment, abolition, regulations changes and so on in response to applications to the

prefecture from school corporations, and the private school council discusses whether to accept the applications or not. The council is composed of scholars of education, specifically people involved with private schools and university faculty. Also, the discussions are attended not only by the screening committee members but by staff from the prefectural private school affairs departments, who serve as a secretariat, acting for the school corporations insofar as explaining the application content in their stead, and speaking for the screening prefecture. For especially serious matters such as school establishment, a two-stage screening progress for establishment planning and establishment approval is adopted.

Essentially, rejections and continued screenings⁽⁴⁾ are unusual. Based on the author's aggregation of private school council minutes from around Japan over the five years from 2017 to 2021, found amid disclosed information regarding private school screening council results on prefectural websites, of 2,836 screenings, 2,745 were approved, leaving 91 unapproved or continued; this means that the rate of approval for matters in question was 96.8%.⁽⁵⁾ Also, among those calculated as continued screenings, the reason was not unsuitability; while some prefectures produced a "continued screening" result at the first stage of two, as the information online is hard to categorize, it is thought that rejections and continued screenings due to unsuitability were even fewer. In addition, within all the screenings over the past five years in the case study prefectures, the number of rejections or continued screenings was 0 out of 88 for Nagano, 3 out of 73 for Okinawa, and 4 out of 126 for Ibaraki.

2.2. Reasons for continued screening/conditional approval

Reasons for rejection or continued screening include insufficient preparation for school management or a weak basis for establishment. In

the screening of the establishment plan for A High School in Ibaraki Prefecture, the private school council secretariat pointed out that a wide-area correspondence system required application to MEXT and that the required applications for opinions to the prefectures where students would be recruited were incomplete, and a judgment of continued screening was reached (Ibaraki Prefecture Private School Council, 9/24/1998).

Also, approval may be granted on a conditional basis in the case of similar lack of preparation or weaknesses in the application content. When B High School's establishment approval screening in Ibaraki Prefecture resulted in conditional approval, the conditions given were confirmation of MEXT's views, clear disclosure of methods of promotion of extracurriculars, et cetera (ibid. 10/15/2021). C High School in Nagano Prefecture was granted approval pending confirmation of points such as the unspecified organization of instructors (not yet at the actual employment stage, etc.) (Nagano Prefecture Private School Council, 2/20/2008).

2.3. Reasons for application for expanded capacity/additional recruitment areas

Finally, this section organizes why existing schools attempt to increase their capacity or add recruitment areas through changing school regulations.

With regard to student capacity and recruitment areas, private school councils call on school corporations to submit applications with clear estimates. Therefore, the schools may be asked to submit corrections when the basis for their capacity estimates is weak; three cases when the capacity as of the establishment planning screening was reduced as of the establishment approval screening were confirmed. Also, in Nagano and Ibaraki Prefectures, statements in the private school councils have confirmed that the secretariat's guidance prevents prefectures without

face-to-face instructional facilities from becoming recruitment areas, with the exception of prefectures adjacent to cities with extensive transportation capacities.

Applications for student capacity increases after schools are established take place when the existing capacity is full and more students are expected. In a screening on school regulations changes permitting capacity increase, the Okinawa Prefecture secretariat gave D High School's reason for application as "simply because the student numbers are increasing" (Okinawa Prefecture Private School Council, 9/11/2019). The current capacity must be expected to be filled, while further increases may be applied for if that becomes possible.

When added recruitment areas are applied for simultaneously with capacity increases, as with capacity increases alone, the purpose is usually interpreted as the expansion of the existing school's upper limits. On the other hand, some applications are filed because the capacity cannot be filled as is. E High School in Ibaraki Prefecture applied to add recruitment areas when their capacity filling rate reached 10% or so (Ibaraki Prefecture Private School Council, 3/25/2005). Also, F High School in Nagano Prefecture applied upon finding in the school's first year that they did not have as many students as they had expected (Nagano Prefecture Private School Council, 10/27/2020). As in these cases, recruitment areas may be added in order to fulfill current capacity.

As shown above, applications for capacity increases and added recruitment areas are made when the applying school corporation has expectations that they will be fulfilled and the conditions necessary will be arranged. During the screening process, there was no observable sign of coordination with other correspondence high schools, let alone full-time or part-time high schools; the expectations of the applying school corporation were the only basis for screening.

3. Analysis of prefectural intent and authority concerning the expansion of correspondence high schools

3.1. Expectations for correspondence high schools

In overall terms, the prefectures had expectations for the regional promotion effects of private correspondence high schools, specifically the three benefits stated below.

First, the creation of diverse educational opportunities. In questions at the Nagano Prefectural Regular Committee on the Environment and Education about the application and acceptance rate of full-time high schools, a committee member pointed out that private high school applicants were causing the number of prefectural high school applicants to decrease; in response, the High School Education Section head said “As you pointed out, students are entering private schools as well as, in recent years, increasingly entering correspondence curricula; these needs are, naturally, an option in terms of diverse learning opportunities as far as junior high school students are concerned, which we consider a good thing” (Nagano Prefectural Regular Committee on the Environment and Education, 3/11/2022). The prefectures appear to be positively oriented toward the creation of educational opportunities which prefectural high schools cannot offer.

Second, collaboration between the prefecture and the school corporation. Ibaraki Prefecture has signed various collaboration agreements with school corporations operating private correspondence high schools established within the prefecture, concerning subject and special activities, education using ICT, regional promotion and so on (Ibaraki Prefectural Assembly, 9/7/2022).

Third, student visits to the prefecture for in-person classes. The Ibaraki prefectural governor stated in the prefectural assembly that “many students from around Japan will visit this prefecture for in-person classes,

leading to expectations of regional and industrial energization” (Ibaraki Prefectural Assembly, 11/25/2020). Also, during the establishment approval screening for G High School in Okinawa Prefecture, a committee member stated that “the most important thing of all is how many students have come to Okinawa” (Okinawa Prefecture Private School Council, 3/11/2016). Under Okinawa’s unique screening standards for correspondence high school approval, school rules and application guidelines must state explicitly that students will undergo face-to-face instruction at least once while enrolled, indicating their high level of expectations for student visits to the prefecture.

3.2. Concerns about the expansion of correspondence high schools

While aware of benefits in the form of regional promotion, prefectures in their supervisory capacity also express concerns over the expansion of private correspondence high schools. Three reasons therefor are as follows.

First, competition among increasing numbers of correspondence high schools. At the establishment planning screening for H High School in Ibaraki, a committee member asked, “With correspondence high schools being established one after the next, don’t we need regulations of some kind?” (Ibaraki Prefecture Private School Council, 9/27/2002). At the establishment approval screening for I High School in Nagano, doubts arose given the two correspondence high schools already present in the same region: “This may lead to competition among educational businesses. Is this establishment really appropriate?” (Nagano Prefecture Private School Council, 10/27/2006).

Second, distrust regarding management. During the school regulations change screening intended to enable F High School in Nagano Prefecture to add recruitment areas, committee members raised doubts about whether the managing school corporation could be trusted (Nagano

Prefecture Private School Council, 10/27/2020).

Third, defensive moves on the part of the recruitment area prefecture with regard to student recruitment from correspondence high schools established in other prefectures. At the school regulations change screening intended to enable J High School in Ibaraki Prefecture to add recruitment areas, the prefecture's response when asked to provide an opinion on having another prefecture become a recruitment area was "No problem. With student numbers declining as they are now, the private school council is, as a general principle, not approving increased capacity. However, in order to fulfill the high school correspondence regulations standards, it is legally inescapable" (Ibaraki Prefecture Private School Council, 3/28/2001). At the establishment planning screening for K High School in Nagano Prefecture as well, regarding recruitment areas, "we have received responses from all prefectures involved that it is inevitable," along with requests that unsuitable face-to-face instruction be avoided, as explained by the secretariat (Nagano Prefecture Private School Council, 10/16/2013). Prefectures appear to take a passive stance on recruitment areas.

As shown above, in their supervisory capacity over private schools, prefectures have indicated their alarm over internecine competition among large numbers of private correspondence high schools within their bounds, the appearance of untrustworthy school corporations, and student recruitment within their bounds from correspondence high schools in other prefectures. However, none of these concerns were observed in the Okinawa Prefecture private school council or assembly. This is thought to be due to the low number of correspondence high schools there, reducing the chance of competition, and to the greater expectations of students coming to Okinawa through the establishment of correspondence high schools in comparison to concerns.

3.3. Limitations of prefectural authority

The prefectures were particularly given to expressing concerns about the expansion of correspondence high schools in their private school councils. However, even when concerns were present, approval was bestowed on school establishment, capacity increase, and addition of recruitment areas, as long as the standards were met and the plan had no unclear or poorly estimated points noted. This is because, as noted in the previous section, prefectures are compelled to approve plans as long as standards are met. At the school regulations change screening intended to enable F High School in Nagano Prefecture to add recruitment areas, although a committee member expressed doubts, the council stated that “in fact as long as the requirements are met, we have to approve the application” (Nagano Prefecture Private School Council, 10/27/2020). Likewise, at the establishment approval screening for L High School in Ibaraki Prefecture, the council stated that “social trends are toward relaxing regulations, so as long as the standards are met, we have to approve establishment,” indicating frequent statements of this kind when concerns arose at private school councils about screening items (Ibaraki Prefecture Private School Council, 9/30/2003).

Also, as noted above, the prefecture where a given correspondence school is established requests the opinions of prefectures which are to become recruitment areas. In this regard, at the school regulations change screening intended to enable H High School in Ibaraki Prefecture to add recruitment areas, a committee member asked if they would need permission from all prefectures if the entire country were to be specified as the recruitment area, to which the secretariat replied “Permission is not required, only requesting opinions”; thus, as long as the standards are met, it is apparently difficult to refuse to become a recruitment area (Ibaraki Prefecture Private School Council, 9/30/2004).

Further, extreme capacity overflow became a problem at L High School

in Ibaraki Prefecture, with questions reaching the Prefectural General Affairs Planning Standing Committee. Here, the General Affairs Section head explained that “we have made an onsite examination yearly and provided guidance toward amending the capacity overflow. The school responded that they would take measures such as restricting entrance conditions, and we have confirmed the amendment process so far.” However, the section head added that “we cannot reject an application for approval of capacity increase when submitted, so having accepted the application for increase, along with continuing amendment guidance for the capacity status quo, with regard to the plan to increase capacity, we plan to examine stringently how the school makes sure the required environment is ensured, such as specific instructor assignments, the grading process during educational activities, the implementation of face-to-face instruction and so on, while in formal terms submitting the application to the private school council to judge whether it should be approved” (Ibaraki Prefecture General Affairs Planning Standing Committee, 12/12/2017). In fact, thereafter the high school applied to increase its capacity and was approved (Ibaraki Prefecture Private School Council, 10/2/2020).

As shown above, the prefectures consider their own approval authority to be bound and exercise it accordingly, in that they must confer approval if the legal standards are met, regardless of any concerns. The background of this approach may be found in part in the influence of the precedent in which, at a trial concerning the 1989 screening of a miscellaneous school (not one of the school types defined under Article 1 of the School Education Act) which was refused establishment approval in spite of fulfilling the standards, the court ordered the rejection to be cancelled.⁽⁶⁾ With no screening for standards beyond the legal framework, schools are established, their capacities increased, and recruitment areas added without coordination with any other schools, as long as they meet the

standards. Prefectures find themselves in the position of being unable to stop the expansion of correspondence high schools, even while concerned.

4. Analysis of the intent and authority of municipalities concerning the expansion of correspondence high schools

4.1. Expectations for the expansion of correspondence high schools

Municipal expectations toward the expansion of private correspondence high schools were similar in many ways to those of prefectures, such as the diversification of educational opportunities, contribution to educational activities on the part of private correspondence high schools, promotion of the municipality to students from other prefectures, and economic effects.

In M City, the establishment of a private correspondence high school led to expectations from the head of the Urban Planning Department, which has jurisdiction over closed school buildings, for “the provision of a new learning space” and so on (Ibaraki Prefecture M City Full Assembly, 5/9/2019). Also, N City Assembly members welcomed the diversification of educational opportunities in creating a regional-type education city through the increased numbers of educational institutions in the city brought about by the establishment of a private correspondence high school (Nagano Prefecture N City Assembly, 12/8/2016).

The private correspondence high school in N City offers English education at a nursery school. Also, the head of the Planning and Policy Department in O City praised the contributions to city educational activities by the private correspondence high school there, such as running a Japanese language course (Ibaraki Prefecture O City Assembly, 6/7/2022).

Further, promotion of the municipality may also be on offer. Many

private correspondence high schools conduct activities linked with the municipality during in-person classes, praised by an Economic Department head as “conveying the appeal of P City, which itself is apparently part of G High School’s appeal, to high school students from outside the prefecture” (Okinawa Prefecture P City Assembly, 12/17/2017).

Finally, there are considerable expectations for economic effects. Both M and P Cities hoped for economic effects due to students visiting the cities for in-person classes (Ibaraki Prefecture M City Assembly, 5/9/2019; Okinawa Prefecture P City Assembly, 12/9/2015). A Q City Assembly member pointed out that “this time such-and-such many people come to D High School, and next time it’s as many as thus-and-such people, increasing through students coming for in-person classes, with the benefits reaching the surrounding areas as well,” arguing that the city should consider the cramped buildings used by D High School in light of the connection of their improvement to city development and hinting at expectations for more students visiting due to increased capacity at D High School (Okinawa Prefecture Q City Assembly, 10/5/2022).

As shown above, municipalities have considerable expectations for regional promotion effects through the expansion of private correspondence high schools.

4.2. Concerns about the expansion of correspondence high schools

Elsewhere, examples of concerns were also found, if only one: because this is an important example hinting at the potential for municipalities to discourage high school establishment, an overview of the case and the municipality’s stance on the reuse and provision of closed school buildings is provided here.

The case is based in a discussion at the assembly of R City, Ibaraki Prefecture, of an agenda item involving providing a municipally owned

closed school building and additional funding to a school corporation planning to establish a high school. Some assembly members expressed doubts about the school corporation, with several voicing objections on the basis of reluctance to provide city assets free of charge without full accountability from the school corporation. However, others were in favor of the proposal, given that the school corporation had the highest score of the various applications for use of the former school location, that there had been no major objections arising at the local briefing, and so on; the agenda item was passed by a majority vote and the school corporation established a correspondence high school upon receipt of a closed school building and funding from the city (R City, Ibaraki Prefecture, Assembly, 6/16/2021).

Here let us focus on the point that the school corporation had made attempts to obtain closed school buildings in other cities in and outside Ibaraki Prefecture, but had been refused due to the lack of prospects for economic effects on the area, lack of understanding from local citizens, etc. A school building was essential in order to meet the standards for school establishment, so the discussion of whether the city should provide a closed school building was effectively functioning as a pre-screening for the private school council's screening. At the same time, the perspective applied was not the same as the establishment standards. With regard to the reasons for concern and rejection, local economic effects and local citizens' understanding are natural viewpoints when discussing the provision of municipally owned assets. Given that other school corporations may be unable to acquire closed school buildings for similar reasons and may thus abandon the school proposal, and that the provision of closed school buildings can be negotiated outside city assemblies as well, it is possible that other school corporations have been refused the use of buildings in the past.

Further, not restricted to this example but also in regard to other closed

school buildings used for private correspondence high schools as targeted by the analysis in this paper, cases of multiple applications have been confirmed, as well as those where none of the applications were selected (Okinawa Prefecture P City Assembly, 12/18/2013; Nagano Prefecture S City “Assembly News” March 2016, etc.). That is, municipalities also think hard before selecting which applicants to provide with closed school buildings. Given the confirmation of examples of outright rejection as well, it can be said that municipalities are capable of discouraging school establishment by refusing to provide the facilities or land needed for the school.

This section has thus noted that while municipalities have strong expectations of regional promotion due to the expansion of private correspondence high schools, they can also discourage the establishment of these schools by refusing to provide closed school buildings, etc.

5. Conclusion

This paper’s analysis has been conducted in order to clarify the influence of the intent and authority of regional administrative organizations and local assemblies on the expansion of correspondence high schools; below, the results of the analysis are organized and discussed.

The paper has demonstrated the following three points. First, student capacity and recruitment areas can be expanded to any degree if full capacity and establishment of satellite facilities such as face-to-face instruction are planned for. Second, while prefectures’ expectations of the expansion of private correspondence high schools are mainly along the lines of the creation of diverse educational opportunities, collaboration with school corporations, and the presence of numerous students through in-person classes, they also have concerns including competition among

correspondence high schools, distrust of school management, and alarm about student recruitment from correspondence high schools established in other prefectures. However, the approving agency in the form of the private school council—at least in the cases examined in this paper—exercises its approval authority as an act of bound judgment, being required to grant approval if the standards are met, regardless of any doubts about the application. Third, municipalities have expectations of the expansion of private correspondence high schools similar to those of prefectures, in the form of the creation of educational opportunities, contribution to municipal educational activities, promotion of the city to students from outside the prefecture, and economic effects from students visiting the city. However, when the provision of closed school buildings is involved, municipalities can also discourage the establishment of schools by refusing to provide closed school buildings in the case of concerns about the school corporation or the establishment plan.

Based on these results, the intent and authority of regional administrations and local assemblies toward the expansion of correspondence high schools can be explained as follows. First, prefectural private school-related departments and private school councils, which oversee private schools, showed some concerns about the expansion of correspondence high schools based on higher numbers of correspondence high schools within the prefecture, alarm over student recruitment from correspondence high schools in other prefectures, and so on. However, their position makes it difficult to say no, which has led to the expansion of private correspondence high schools. In this context, the local governments which provide closed school buildings can choose whether or not to do so based on different viewpoints from those of the prefectural private school overseeing bodies, such as local economic effects and whether citizens' understanding can be obtained, thus enabling them to exercise authority over the expansion of correspondence high

schools. Although this paper confirmed only one school corporation example, local governments may also refuse to provide closed school buildings, thus succeeding in discouraging the expansion of correspondence high schools. Most of these local governments are municipalities (cities, towns, or villages), and the department of jurisdiction, like the M City Urban Planning Department, may be a general administrative department rather than educational or private-school related authorities. Further, the decision about providing school buildings is sometimes made at city assemblies. Therefore, authority over private school establishment can be exercised by municipalities, general administrative departments unrelated to private schools, or city assemblies, normally with no oversight over private schools.

Based on the above, let us consider the two significant aspects of the findings of this paper.

First, the analysis of the authority of private school councils and private school-related departments shows a new aspect of the mechanism of correspondence high school expansion. Previous research has explained that the establishment purpose and capacity adjustment process of correspondence high schools differ from those of full-time and part-time high schools and that their expansion mechanism relies on legal revision through relaxed regulations. However, this paper has shown that private school councils and private school-related departments exercise their own authority as bound and must grant approval even when they have concerns. In addition to the academic significance of elucidating a new aspect of the expansion mechanism, this can be said to have a social significance with regard to the guarantee of correspondence high school quality as called for in recent years as well. Reinforced standards, as in the revisions of recent years, could serve as a prescription for the guarantee of quality. However, when considering the reasons for concerns about expansion as shown in this paper, many of them—such as distrust for school

corporations or plans and competition with other schools—are difficult to put into writing as standards or to formalize as establishment standards for a given school. Based on these results, it is necessary to reinforce the authority of private school councils and private school-related departments, specifically to grant them the clear authority to refuse approval or call for continued screening upon thorough discussion in the case of doubts regarding a plan, thus enabling them to adjust capacity or recruitment areas so as to minimize competition between correspondence schools.

Second, it has been made clear that when the provision of closed school buildings is involved, general municipal administrative departments and assemblies not related to private school administration can exercise authority over the expansion of private correspondence high schools. It has been pointed out by Uchida et al. (2019) that municipalities provide closed school buildings and allow correspondence high schools to be established in expectations of economic effects, regional promotion, and collaboration with the community. However, the significance of this paper in particular can be said to be in its analysis of municipalities, which have gone almost unremarked on in private school research, and in its demonstration of the possibilities for general administrative departments and assemblies not related to private school administration to become involved in the expansion of correspondence high schools, through analyzing individual actors within municipalities.

As above, the findings of this paper—that private school councils and private school-related departments have difficulty restraining the expansion of correspondence high schools, while municipalities and general administrative departments and assemblies not related to private schools may play a role in this expansion—raise the issue of what actors are to coordinate in what ways the establishment, capacity, and recruitment areas of correspondence high schools. The expansion of some

private correspondence high schools conceals others which stop recruiting or close down because of falling student numbers. If this situation remains unaddressed, more and more correspondence high schools will close down, while other private correspondence high schools possess the lion's share of students, leading to an oligopoly. The reinforced authority of private school councils and private school-related departments mentioned above is one possible countermeasure. Also, based on the authority related to the provision of closed school buildings, we may note the need for close collaboration of private school councils and private school-related departments with the municipalities and/or departments which have jurisdiction over closed school buildings. Further, based on the intent and authority of the prefectures which serve as recruitment areas, the ability of the prefecture of establishment alone to coordinate correspondence high schools' capacity and recruitment areas is restricted, requiring not only reinforced authority of the prefecture serving as the recruitment area but also discussion of the organization of a system coordinating wide-range correspondence high schools' capacity and recruitment areas nationwide. By reinforcing authority and collaboration and organizing a system thus, it should be possible to realize a more stable relationship between regional administration and private correspondence high schools, as well as to achieve school management with continuity.

Finally, this paper has two limitations. First, because the paper's analysis of private school council minutes and discussion materials is limited in terms of case studies to discussion of prefectural /correspondence high schools, it does not fully grasp the intent and authority of private school council discussions on nationwide schools, other school types, or other curricula. Second, although discussion of ways to use closed school buildings takes place outside assemblies in many cases, the paper draws only on analysis of assembly minutes. These

two points constitute issues to address in the future.

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Notes

(1) Some prefectures are inclined to discourage the establishment and increase of capacity of private high schools as the birth rate declines; this study likewise confirmed within its analysis of minutes that in the 2000s some prefectures clearly indicated policies to discourage the new establishment of private high schools, while others were disinclined to permit capacity increases.

(2) Prefectures may also own closed school buildings, but as MEXT (2022) indicates, more of these buildings tend to be elementary and junior high schools than high schools, meaning that they are more likely to be owned by municipalities. It may be for this reason that private correspondence high schools have often been found to make use of closed elementary and junior high school buildings; of the 24 schools targeted by this paper, none used closed high school buildings and there were no examples of closed school buildings provided by prefectures.

(3) Also, the analysis does not target correspondence high schools established by designated structural reform district businesses. In addition, some schools established in this form have since come under the ownership of school corporations, in which case the analysis addressed only the screening for school regulations changes.

(4) Whether items not approved by the screening are considered “rejected” or “for further screening” varies only in terminology by prefecture; as re-screening is possible upon application, the two are listed together here.

(5) This total covers 40 prefectures over 5 years, omitting several prefectures, as information disclosure varies by prefecture.

(6) The details of the trial can be found on the court website at

“Administrative incidents: Precedents” (https://www.courts.go.jp/app/hanrei_jp/detail5?id=16783).

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Appendix

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