

Before I begin, I'd like to ask you a simple question.

Are children really standing on the same starting line in life?

I began to think seriously about this question because of something that happened to a friend of mine.

She was not lazy.

She was not unmotivated.

She was simply left out, because of financial difficulties at home.

If we look around our society, we can see the same pattern everywhere.

Some children visit museums or attend extracurricular lessons on weekends, while others have never been to a zoo even once.

This is not a difference in talent.

It is a difference in opportunity.

Opportunity creates experience, and experience shapes children's interests, curiosity, and confidence.

These experiences expand future possibilities and create the feeling of,

"Maybe I can do this too."

However, the reality is that these valuable experiences are strongly influenced by family income and parents' available time.

Before children even have the chance to try, a gap already exists.

This is what we call the "opportunity gap."

That is why I believe now is the time for Kashiwa City to take the first step toward a society without opportunity gaps.

I researched policies in other cities in Japan and overseas that aim to reduce opportunity gaps.

Through this research, I found a clear common point among successful initiatives.

They do not leave experiences entirely to families.

Instead, they use schools as a starting point.

So, what about Kashiwa City?

Kashiwa City is rich in resources.

We have universities and research institutions in the Kashiwanoha Campus area, the natural environment around Lake Teganuma,

In other words, Kashiwa City does not lack resources.

Therefore, I propose using community schools to reduce opportunity gaps in Kashiwa City.

A community school is a system in which schools and local communities work together to support education.

I propose that community schools be positioned not only as places of learning, but also as “gateways to experience.”

School is the one place that all children are connected to.

In addition, information about experience-based programs should be organized into a single catalog.

Until now, information has been scattered, and only families who were already interested could participate.

By gathering opportunities into one catalog and sharing it through schools, access becomes fair and simple.

Most importantly, we need a system that allows children to participate proactively.

For this purpose, I propose giving every child an “Experience Passport” with experience points.

Using points lowers psychological barriers and encourages the feeling of, “I want to try.”

In this system, adults do not choose for children.

Children choose for themselves and take action.

For those who have never had such opportunities, this choice itself becomes their first step forward.

Guaranteeing this “chance to choose” is the key to reducing opportunity gaps.

Children cannot overcome experience inequality on their own.

That is exactly why Kashiwa City should use community schools to build a system that reaches every single child with none left behind, none left out, none left in the dark.

Connect the community to schools, and the doors to children’s futures will open.

Together, let us be the light that illuminates every future.