

Suicides high in Japan as school term reopens

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TOKYO - A wave of youth suicides hit Japan last week as high-pressure schools reopened after a five-week summer vacation.

Eight youths - an elementary school boy, six junior high school students and a high school student - killed themselves in separate incidents last week. Police and education authorities said ju-

venile suicides usually occur most frequently around the start of a new school term, but that last week's number was high.

Japanese schools produce some of the best-educated students in the world, but the system is known as demanding and competitive. During summer breaks many schools assign homework and expect their students to show up for midsummer school events.

Intense pressure is applied at an early age to perform well in school because academic records and test scores influence whether one goes to the university, what career one pursues and even one's marriage prospects. While many parents worry that the system puts too much pressure on children, they say there is little they can do if they want their children to succeed in Japan.

Officials of the National Policy Agency on Thursday said they had not yet fully investigated the eight suicides.

The youngest suicide victim, 12-year-old Eitaro Osawa, reportedly lay down on railroad tracks in front of an oncoming train after his mother scolded him for picking up trash from the neighborhood and bringing it into the house.

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