

# Reading: Kamaishi East Junior High School

## The students of Kamaishi

On March 11, 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred at 2:46 pm. It was a sunny, Friday afternoon.

The earthquake had a magnitude of 9.0 and generated a tsunami that traveled quickly to the east coast of Japan. Tsunami warning signals were sent in just a few short minutes and the tsunami arrived on the shores of coastal communities within 10-30 minutes after the earthquake.

The Miyagi and Iwate regions of Japan were some of the hardest hit coastal communities. The town of Kamaishi is within this part of the coast and was devastated by the tsunami. Over 1,000 people died in Kamaishi that day, including 5 school-aged children who were not in school the day of the tsunami. However, the 99.8% of all schoolchildren enrolled in the junior high and elementary schools survived.

When the tsunami warning was sent to Kamaishi that day, students at Kamaishi East Junior High School knew what to do. They evacuated for higher ground immediately, helping both younger students from the neighboring elementary school and elderly residents in the homes nearby. The almost 300 junior high school students are responsible for saving almost 3,000 lives that day.

## What did the junior high students do?

Most of the schools in Japan practiced earthquake and tsunami drills, which often consisted of protecting oneself during the earthquake, and then evacuating to the playground, stadiums, or upper floors of the schools in response to the tsunami.

During the 2011 earthquake, the students knew the earthquake was a big one and would cause a tsunami. The earthquake caused the junior high school alarm system to break before tsunami warnings were sent, but the students knew what to do. They knew to evacuate to



higher ground in the hills near the school and to do so quickly. As they evacuated, the students did the following:

- They didn't hesitate to evacuate because they knew the way to respond in the situation.
- They stayed calm and headed to an evacuation zone.
- They shouted a "tsunami is coming" to warn nearby residents.
- They helped elementary school children and elderly residents.

### How did they know what to do?

For several years the students at the junior high school had been working with an engineer, Toshitaka Katada, to learn how to respond in a natural hazard. Katada spent 10 hours each year helping students plan their response for when an earthquake or tsunami might happen.



It is through this education that the students knew how to respond and where to go quickly to save their lives and the lives of other students and community residents.

### Sources

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