

## Reopening Schools

To make sure children can continue their studies



▲ The entrance ceremony for Minamisanriku Municipal Togura Elementary School, held at the former Zennoji Elementary School in Tome on May 11th, 2011.

The earthquake brought abrupt and dramatic changes to everyday life for the children of Minamisanriku. Most of the town's schools had been located on high ground and were designated evacuation sites or shelters, but even these schools were engulfed by the tsunami. Considered, until then, the cornerstones of the safety and security of the community, they collapsed quite easily. Togura Elementary School was completely destroyed, and Togura Junior High School, Natari Elementary School, and Isatomae Elementary School were also flooded and rendered unusable. Children lost their places of learning in March, which is the end of the Japanese school year and an important transition time. Schools that escaped tsunami damage turned into evacuation shelters. Crowded with evacuees, they were places of chaos.

Children needed to resume their studies urgently. The city of Tome reopened Zennoji Elementary School, which had closed down in March 2009, to cater to schoolchildren from Togura Elementary School and Togura Junior High School in the Togura District. The city of Tome provided the equipment required for the reopening of the school—desks, chairs, blackboards, and the like, in addition to free school lunches. Other organizations provided necessities such as school supplies and stationery for the children.

On May 10th, two months after the earthquake, elementary and junior high schools were reopened in Minamisanriku. The voices of the young students echoed in school buildings for the first time in many long weeks. The teachers were mindful to ensure that the children could return to their daily lives with peace of mind and that they could work on their studies calmly.

Togura Elementary School was rebuilt on higher ground in October 2015, while Togura Junior High School was merged with Shizugawa Junior High School in April 2014.