

DPP's risky curricula review process

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The 2014 high-school curriculum guidelines that were criticized as being “China-centric” and for downplaying the significance of the 228 Incident and the White Terror Era sparked a mass protest last year, and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) administration is striving to right past wrongs.

However, is the DPP overdoing it by allowing students to serve on the Ministry of Education's curriculum review committee?

It is unusual for a government to implement such an education policy, and the DPP administration should approach the curriculum review with extra caution to ensure fairness and justice in the process.

Therefore, it is a concern that the amendment to the Senior High School Education Act (高級中等教育法) seems to have hit a snag.

As two futile conventions held last week and this week at Taichung Home Economics and Commercial High School have shown, the election of students to serve as committee members is harder than the ministry expected.

Students attending the conventions were supposed to elect committee members among themselves last week, but eventually decided that the ministry should devise the election rules and that the election be postponed.

Under regulations formulated by National Chengchi University professor Chuang Kuo-jung (莊國榮) and fine-tuned by Minister of Education Pan Wen-chung (潘文忠), seven to 11 students are to be elected to take part in the review of curriculum guidelines for students from primary to secondary school.

As objectivity should be the overarching principle when forming curricula, it is important that the ministry make sure the students do not have any political affiliations, so that they will not be

manipulated.

According to the amendment, students are to be elected on the principle of gender equality, where the representation of males or females should not be lower than one-third of the committee.

On top of that, there must be Aboriginal students on the panel.

While these requirements clearly show that the government is embracing progressive values, they have added to the difficulty of the election, making the outcome more unpredictable.

With the election delayed until tomorrow, the nation is waiting to see if Chuang and the ministry can overcome the challenge and propose a convincing solution to the impasse.

However, the election of student representatives is hardly the only committee issue waiting to be resolved.

Under the amendment, principals, parents and experts selected from objective members of the public are also to be nominated by the Executive Yuan and approved by legislators.

This prompts the question: will legislators across party lines be willing to put aside their differences when vetting the nominees?

With members on the previous committee still reluctant to make their names known and publish meeting minutes regarding the disputed curriculum guidelines, the DPP has demonstrated a resolve to put an end to the much-maligned opaque curriculum review process by introducing an entirely objective and open review committee, and this alone is commendable.

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However, with curricula for the 12-year national education system scheduled to take effect in 2018, time is running out for the DPP.

Given the far-reaching consequences the committee's work will have, the DPP, as the ruling party, has a responsibility to ensure that education reform will work out as it had envisaged, as in education, failure is not an option.

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