

Student protesters target K-12 agency

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Students protesting against the government's high-school curriculum guideline changes force open a shutter at the K-12 Education Administration building in Taipei yesterday afternoon.

Photo: Lo Pei-der, Taipei Times

Students forced their way into the K-12 Education Administration building in Taipei yesterday, promising further action by the end of the week if controversial high-school curriculum guidelines are not withdrawn.

About 50 students gathered at the agency's building — part of the Ministry of Education — at about 3pm, seeking to present their demands to agency officials.

Thirteen forced their way into building before employees pulled a metal gate in front of the entrance.

A standoff followed, as students outside the building forced the gate up, but were unable to break through an interior police cordon.

The ministry lacked sincerity when responding to student requests that the guidelines be withdrawn and instead just repeated prior statements, Northern Taiwan Anti-Curriculum Changes Alliance convener Chu Chen (朱陳) said.

Chu demanded that the ministry guarantee the safety of students inside the building and select an official to accept their petition.

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Students yelled slogans such as: “Oppose brainwashing guidelines, open up black box procedures.” They also demanded that ministry officials “open up the iron gates and let our comrades go.”

Students inside the building made their way to the fifth-floor office of K-12 Administrator Director Wu Ching-shan (吳正山), looking for someone to receive their concerns after failing to find Wu.

Adjustments to high-school curriculum guidelines have generated controversy for what critics describe as a “China-centric” focus.

The protest yesterday came on a deadline students had imposed for the guidelines to be withdrawn.

The K-12 Education Administration is responsible for implementing the guidelines and represented a softer target than the ministry building, which has been barricaded with barbed wire and cast-iron doors in recent weeks.

The police force at the ministry took more than 10 minutes to reach the K-12 Education Administration building, which is several blocks from the ministry.

After police reinforcements arrived, a 10-minute standoff occurred before students let go of the gate and sat silently in front of the building, urging that students who made it inside be allowed to exit and that officials emerge to face their concerns.

Later, Han Chun-shu (韓坤樹), deputy head of the agency’s secondary and vocational education division, led out the 13 students inside the building and issued a response to the protesters’ concerns, saying that the ministry would draft additional curriculum materials on the controversial portions of the guidelines by next month, allowing teachers to supplement textbooks with class discussion.

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The students opted to withdraw, but repeated their dissatisfaction with the what they described as the “skipping needle” of the ministry’s responses.

They would return with more intense measures, they said, with their next moves to be posted online within a week.

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