

Student protesters camp out outside ministry gates

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High-school students display placards against the revision of curriculum guidelines at a demonstration in front of the education ministry in Taipei on Tuesday.

Photo: Sam Yeh, AFP

High-school students camped outside the Ministry of Education gates yesterday, rallying for the withdrawal of controversial high-school curriculum guidelines.

Northern Taiwan Anti-Curriculum Changes Alliance spokesman Wang Pin-chen (王品陳) said that the protest was forced by the ministry's chilly response to students' requests for talks, with past student-led marches and other actions leading only to ministry statements that "whoever shouts loudest is not necessarily right."

"We, as students, refuse to spend 12 hours a day studying something that covers up historical truth," she said, reiterating student demands that the current curriculum guidelines be withdrawn and replaced with diverse and objective guidelines adopted in accordance to just and democratic procedures.

Adjustments to high-school curriculum guidelines have been controversial due to an allegedly "China-centric" focus and opaque "black box" approval process.

Wang also rejected today's ministry-sponsored forums on the guidelines at four national high schools as illegitimate.

"Our forum is here, in front of the ministry, and we hope that ministry officials can come here to

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communicate with us, rather than places where they stood us up in the past,” she said, referring to the ministry’s earlier cancelation of the forums.

The first forum saw Minister of Education Wu Se-hwa (吳思華) confronted by student activists.

Wu yesterday returned from an official visit to France and was not slated to participate in today’s forums.

More than 300 people participated in the rally yesterday, with students piling textbooks outside of the ministry’s entrance to express their dissatisfaction.

Student also wrote messages on a long piece of white cloth stretched along the length of the razor wire barricade in front of the ministry.

National Taichung First Senior High School Apple Tree Commune Club spokesperson Chen Chien-hsun (陳建勳) criticized ministry statements that curriculum guidelines should be in accordance with the Republic of China Constitution. Under the ministry’s logic, textbooks should be changed to identify Mount Everest as the nation’s highest peak rather than Jade Mountain (玉山) because the Constitution says the Republic of China includes all of China as its territory, he said.

Activist Mu Yu-feng (穆宇峰), a recent graduate of National Hsinchu High School, expressed dissatisfaction with the stances of both political parties.

“Neither of the two largest parties have emphasized curriculum guidelines,” he said. “If the Democratic Progressive Party [DPP] disagrees with the outlines, they should have initially called for them to be withdrawn or set forth a solution rather than saying they would take up the matter next year.”

In addition to high-school students and recent graduates, the rally was also attended by a

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substantial number of college students and older residents and activists.

Chang Ching-hao (張景豪), a National Fu Jen Catholic University student, said he came because even though he was interested in Taiwanese history topics like the 228 Incident and the White Terror, he felt that they had been deliberately downplayed or hidden during his education.

Following hours of speeches by historians and protesters, the rally concluded with students lighting candles in the shape of a black umbrella to symbolize their demands to light up the opaque “black box” process under which they say the curriculum guidelines were approved.

Some student protesters camped out overnight at the ministry gates, with a further rally planned for today.

The DPP yesterday voiced its support for the students, while accusing the ministry of lying.

DPP spokesperson Huang Di-ying (黃帝英) said that according to the minutes of a meeting presided over by former minister of education Chiang Wei-ling (蔣偉玲), 15 of the participants voted for the guideline changes, while eight voted against.

However, during a question-and-answer session at the legislature, Minister of Education Wu said the decision was passed “by applause.”

“One of them must be lying, and if Chiang directed ministry staff to record false information, he bears criminal responsibility,” Huang said. “In light of these problems, the ministry should halt the plan to adjust curriculum guidelines, and both Chiang and Wu should face a judicial investigation.”

Additional reporting by Loa lok-sin

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