

Public hearings to be held for new school curriculum

The Office of Basic Education Commission (Obec) will hold public hearings on its new curriculum.

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"Public hearings will continue until we receive clear conclusions on what the new curriculum should be," Benjalug Namfa, director of the Obec Bureau of Academic and Educational Standards, said yesterday.

She said a team had invited parents, teachers and educational experts to attend the first round of public hearings in Bangkok on January 19 and 20.

The new curriculum draft covers the following eight subject groups: Thai; maths; science; social studies, religion and culture; health education and physical education; art; basic occupational skills; and foreign languages.

Benjalug said public hearings would be held in four other regions next month.

"After we gather useful information, we are going to revise our draft and present it to the Basic Education Commission," she said.

The commission had agreed to consider the draft. It had said the adjusted indexes should create better teaching and learning methods, which will help students to think more creatively rather than focusing on subject content which changes constantly.

By helping students to broaden their learning skills, they would be able to improve their standards she said.

The new curriculum must also determine the timeframe for each subject group as the old system had let schools arrange study time, resulting in inconsistencies, she said.

Most schools arranged study time based on the number of teachers they had. Therefore the new curriculum must set the standards.

The change from the class cluster-base to a year-based system was necessary as the past six years of implementing the class cluster-based curriculum showed that teachers - especially those in small schools - were unable to organise their teaching and learning to help students obtain the targeted characters.

Benjalug said under the old curriculum, teachers were supposed to teach students in an integrated manner. They would touch on all topics but the difficulty level would increase according to the academic year as the students move up.

But many teachers still taught separate topics. Prathom 1 to 2 students learnt about themselves and family while Prathom 3 learned about the country and the world. Consequently students could not comprehend the links between these topics.

The old curriculum was too broad and teachers could not interpret it into appropriate teaching plans, she said.

The new curriculum will be year-based so teachers knew clearly what topics they had to teach in each year. The year-based approach would be implemented from Prathom 1 to Mathayom 3 levels, while the higher secondary level would remain class cluster-based to support the Education Minister Wijit Srisa-an's policy of credit-accumulating study.

However, Chulalongkorn University scholar Sompong Jitradab disagreed with the Obec's move to maintain the eight subject groups. "It's like you have solved nothing. What's right for our basic education is a totally new curriculum, not just some adjustment," he said.

The old curriculum had so many weaknesses. Any changes should wait for the new government's policy direction first, he said. The new curriculum should have reduced content, be less complicated and include some subject content in activities and integrated projects. The eight subject groups should be less in number and should be more relevant to students.

"The current curriculum forgets how much children aged seven to 12 need to learn," Sompong added.

He predicted the new change introduced by Obec would last less than two years because the new administration - whether it is led by the People Power Party or the Democrats - would reduce the eight subject groups.

"So holding public hearings at this time would be of no use. It would be at best an adjustment, not a change."

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