

Students in the Central Highlands Province of Dak Lak gathered at their school gate earlier this week in a show of opposition to the school's forced overtime classes.



A screenshot featuring the secret Facebook group of students from Cao Ba Quat High School in the Central Highlands Province of Dak Lak and their parents. The group was created to oppose the school's overtime class policy.

Nguyen Huu Lam, deputy principal of Cao Ba Quat High School confirmed the incident, adding that students who played hooky to join the rally were marked absent from class.

“There are many reasons for student absences and not all students marked absent that day were present at the gathering,” he said.

“Those who gathered in front of the school gate might have misunderstood or accessed the wrong information regarding after-class study time.”

According to some students, expectations were set at the beginning of this school year for students to attend three extra classes per week with four lessons each.

Each lesson cost VND6,000 (US\$0.27). The school’s population is around 1,300.

“Parents have to pay VND6,000 a lesson. With around 30 students in a class, the fee is quite big,” a member of a secret Facebook group opposing the school’s policy of overtime classes posted.

The group was created following the school’s overtime class policy and has attracted nearly 600 students and parents.

“It would be justified if the lessons were good, but they are not, so it’s nothing other than forcing students to attend,” the post added.

In other posts, students said they were not getting home until 8 or 9 in the evening after the extra classes, cutting into their self-study time and limiting opportunities to focus on their personal health and wellness.

“We have to wake up at 5 in the morning to prepare for the main class,” one expressed. “Then we go home at noon for a very quick lunch before rushing back for afternoon classes.”

A group poll was also created on the page, with 53 of the 54 participants voting against joining the overtime classes.

Before implementing the overtime classes, the school asked parents to sign in a letter of approval for their children to attend the classes “voluntarily.”

“Though it said ‘voluntarily’, we wouldn’t dare not let our children join,” one parent said.

Many parents also expressed dismay at seeing their children studying all day and noted the confusion created by the school for sometimes labeling the classes “tutorial” sometimes and other times labeling them “overtime classes.”

“They have no time to rest,” parents stressed.

“We all expressed our disagreement with those classes but the school rejected our opinions,” said N.M.H, parent of an 11th grader at the school.

What does the school say?

Though many oppose the program, deputy principal of Cao Ba Quat High School Nguyen Huu Lam is still a champion for the idea.

According to Lam, the overtime classes were presented to parents for a vote, as well as representatives from parent associations, and most people showed their agreement.

The school has also received no official opposition.

Lam also added that the local education department gave its approval for the school to open the classes.

Meanwhile, director of the Dak Lak provincial Department of Education and Training Pham Dang Khoa said the opposition to the program has yet to be officially reported.

According to Khoa, if the school calls the classes “tutorial classes,” then allowing the whole school to attend is in violation of current laws stipulating that tutorial classes may only be offered to unqualified students and without fees.

The school must also ask for approval from the department before implementing any extra classes.

Khoa said the department is investigating the situation and the results will be announced.

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