



From left: Children learn to play the waist drum with a folk music teacher at a historical family yard in Huzhou, Zhejiang province, in November. WU ZHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY Primary school students write Spring Festival scrolls in Hefei, Anhui province, in December. GE YINIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY A fifth grader takes part in a running game at a school in Fuzhou, Fujian province, in November. XIE GUIMING / FOR CHINA DAILY



The fact that “double reduction” — shorthand for alleviating the twin burdens of homework and private extracurricular tuition on primary and secondary school students — was chosen by netizens as one of last year’s hottest online phrases reflects the significance of the new policy.

In the annual list of the 10 most popular phrases used by Chinese media, “double reduction” ranked sixth. The hottest was “100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China”.

The organizers of the list — the 16th in the series — included the National Language Resources Monitoring and Research Center and the Commercial Press publishing house.

The guideline, issued in late July by the general offices of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, China’s Cabinet, ordered all private academic tutoring institutions to register as nonprofit organizations and barred them from raising money from the public.

The policy also forbade such institutions from holding classes at weekends, during national holidays or winter and summer vacations.

It said local governments should not give approval for any new tutoring institutions to provide academic classes for primary and middle school students, and added that the number of such entities should be reduced considerably.

Public schools should also offer after-class services for students and improve the quality of classroom teaching to meet their demands, it said.

The guideline was aimed at “effectively reducing” the burdens of excessive homework and after-school tutoring on students within one year and to achieve “significant outcomes” within three.

To better implement the policy, the Ministry of Education established a new body — the Department of Supervision of After-school Tutoring Institutions — to regulate extracurricular tutoring schools.

The department is responsible for regulating private providers that target children from kindergarten to high school and for formulating policies on the establishment, content, course hours, employee qualifications and fees charged by such institutions, both online and offline.

It also guides comprehensive law enforcement on extracurricular tutoring and handles major issues in the sector.

Since the central guideline was issued, more than 20 new measures have been issued by different government departments to fully implement the policy.

Closures, transitions

According to the ministry, the combined efforts of central and local governments have resulted in the number of online academic tutoring institutions being cut by 84.1 percent and the number of offline players slashed by 83.8 percent.

Ten provinces and municipalities, including Tianjin, Hebei, Shanxi and Liaoning, have reduced the number of such institutions by more than 90 percent, the ministry said, adding that all remaining entities must either become nonprofit organizations or close.

Guo Yihao, director of the education bureau in Nantong, Jiangsu province, said that by late December the city had just three academic tutoring institutions, with 491 having closed and 271 switching to other sectors.

Meanwhile, education authorities in Tianjin said the city no longer has any private providers of online tutoring, while 92 percent of offline players have closed.

Tutoring giants, including New Oriental Education and Technology Group and TAL Education Group, shuttered operations for children in primary and middle schools from Dec 31.

In a WeChat post on Jan 8, Yu Minhong, New Oriental’s founder and chairman, said the company’s revenue declined by 80 percent last year and its market capitalization fell by 90 percent. He noted that severance payments for laid-off employees, tuition refunds and costs for terminated leases for teaching sites totaled almost 20 billion yuan (\$3.14 billion).

He added that finding a new direction will be key for the compa-

ny this year, so it has increased investment in tutoring courses for college students and in teaching Mandarin overseas.

To that end, on Dec 28, Yu hosted his first livestreaming e-commerce session on Douyin, a popular short-video platform, selling agricultural produce to explore new business opportunities.

During the session, he said the company plans to launch a live-stream e-commerce platform as part of its efforts to diversify operations.

In a separate WeChat post, the company said it decided to launch the platform, because Yu was born and raised in the countryside and he wants to help farmers explore new channels to sell their produce.

Reductions in fees

Fees for tutoring courses offered by new nonprofit providers have

also been significantly reduced after local governments introduced their own guidance fees for such services.

Beijing’s Development and Reform Commission, the city’s education commission and market regulation administration recently released guidance fees for academic tutoring courses for primary and middle school students in the capital, with prices ranging from 20 to 80 yuan per class per student, depending on the number of attendees.

The new fee standards will take effect on Feb 21, and tutoring courses for high school students must comply with them. The maximum prices that tutoring companies can charge will be capped at 10 percent above the guidance fees.

Shanghai authorities also issued guidance fees, equal to those in Beijing, for academic tutoring courses,

and the city’s new standard will be implemented on Feb 17.

The two cities have the highest guidance fees in the country, while the lowest are in Hainan province, where they have dipped to 7 yuan per session per student for offline classes with more than 35 students.

A notice issued in September by the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Education and the State Administration for Market Regulation ordered local governments to establish guidance fees for curriculum-based courses for primary and middle school students by the end of last year to reduce the burden of educational expenses on families.

The average salaries of people working at tutoring companies should not significantly exceed

those of teachers at public schools, the notice said.

New services

Lyu Yugang, director of the Department of Basic Education at the Ministry of Education, said the combined efforts of multiple departments have resulted in improved regulation of the tutoring sector.

The previously unrestrained, chaotic extracurricular tuition market has cooled, with no advertisements visible, as investors have swiftly withdrawn from the heavily regulated market, he said.

The amount of time spent on homework has also been substantially reduced. More than 90 percent of students reported that they were able to finish written homework in the set time, compared with 46 percent before the policy was introduced, he added.

The ministry found that 92.7 percent of public schools have opened after-school arts and sports activities, with 88.3 percent offering reading and 87.3 percent operating interest groups and clubs, he said.

The proportion of students using after-school services rose to 92 percent in the autumn semester, from 49 percent in the spring semester last year, Lyu said. He added that more than 3 million students used day care services provided by 210,000 schools during last year’s summer vacation.

According to a survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics, 73 percent of parents said the amount of homework issued to their children had been markedly reduced, while 85 percent said they were satisfied with the extracurricular services offered by schools.

To meet students’ demands for diversified after-school services, the ministry said it welcomes the participation of outside professionals and social organizations that can add more scientific, cultural and sports courses and improve the attractiveness and effectiveness of such services, Lyu added.

Wang Shijin, vice-president of iFlytek, a leading artificial intelligence provider, said that more than 2,000 primary and secondary schools have introduced the company’s AI-assisted courses into their after-school services.

It has also cooperated with education companies to develop nearly 200 courses on sports, arts and labor education, meaning more students can enjoy quality teaching resources in school, he said.

For example, one of the courses uses virtual reality and other technologies to allow students to enjoy immersive appreciation of ancient Chinese gardens in their classrooms and share their designs of gardens with each other and their parents, he added.

Further measures

The Ministry of Education has reiterated the ban on off-campus academic tutoring activities and warned against excessive homework during the ongoing winter vacation.

Local authorities should crack down on academic tutoring offered under the guise of household services or winter camps, the ministry said, adding that authorities should conduct round-the-clock inspections of all online platforms, using a combination of technology and workers to root out online academic tutoring.

A blacklist of training institutions that violate relevant regulations should be set up, and offenders should be exposed to the public, the ministry said.

It added that channels should be kept open for tipoffs from local law-makers and political advisers, the media and members of the public.

Contact the writer at zoushuo@chinadaily.com.cn

New rules ease burden on school students

All provincial-level entities have revised their regulations governing extracurricular tuition and related activities. **Zou Shuo** reports.



Students fly model planes at an art festival held by a primary school in Guizhou province in November. HUANG XIAOHAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

The most important education stories last year

On Dec 29, the Ministry of Education released the top 10 education news stories from last year.

- 1. The National Vocational Education Conference was held in Beijing on April 12 and 13. It stressed the importance of accelerating construction of a modern vocational education system to nurture more related talent for the country’s modernization.
- 2. President Xi Jinping visited Tsinghua University in Beijing on April 19, ahead of its 110th anniversary. He emphasized the need to build world-class universities with Chinese characteristics to serve national rejuvenation. He also urged Tsinghua to strengthen innovation and cultivate more outstanding, talented people to serve national development.
- 3. On April 22, the Communist Party

of China Central Committee issued a set of revised regulations on work rules for the Party’s primary-level organizations in universities. The regulations called for enhanced efforts to integrate Party building in universities and for greater development of the country’s higher education system.

4. On April 29, the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, the top legislative body, adopted the revised Education Law. The legislation introduced labor education into the country’s basic education policies.

5. On May 21, the “double reduction” policy was adopted at a meeting of the Central Committee for Deepening Overall Reform. On July 24, the guideline was issued by the general offices of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council,

China’s Cabinet, aiming to reduce the burdens of homework and after-school tuition on primary and middle school students.

6. At the ceremony marking the CPC’s centenary, representatives of the Chinese Young Pioneers and the Chinese Communist Youth League saluted the CPC and expressed their commitment to the Party’s cause in a poem. “Rest assured, CPC, we are ready to build a powerful China,” they repeated four times at the end of the ode.

7. Ahead of China’s Teachers’ Day, Xi called on teachers nationwide to provide good guidance for students. He made the remarks in a letter to representatives of model teaching units named after late geophysicist Huang Danian, a professor at Jilin University.

8. Seven provincial-level regions, including Heilongjiang, Gansu and Jilin, introduced plans to reform the national college entrance exam, or *gaokao*. Twenty-one such regions have launched plans for exam reform, aiming to give students more choices in the crucial test.

9. The National Textbook Work Conference decided to further integrate Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era into the nation’s textbooks for students at all levels.

10. On Nov 23, the NPC Standing Committee adopted the Law on Family Education Promotion. The law, which came into effect on Jan 1, is the first on family education and it elevated related education from a family matter to a State affair.