86R12283 CAE-D

By:  Ramos H.B. No. 2954

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to school district grace period policies and the provision of meals to public school students with insufficient balances on prepaid meal cards or in meal accounts.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1.  Section 33.908, Education Code, is amended to read as follows:

Sec. 33.908.  GRACE PERIOD POLICY FOR EXHAUSTED OR INSUFFICIENT MEAL CARD OR ACCOUNT BALANCE. (a) In this section, "regular meal" means a meal for which a school district ordinarily receives reimbursement under the national free or reduced-price lunch program established under 42 U.S.C. Section 1751 et seq.

(b)  The board of trustees of a school district that allows students to use a prepaid meal card or account to purchase meals served at schools in the district shall adopt a grace period policy regarding the use of the cards or accounts. The policy:

(1)  must allow a student whose meal card or account balance is exhausted or insufficient to continue, for a grace period determined by the board of at least two weeks, to purchase regular meals by:

(A)  accumulating a negative balance on the student's card or account; or

(B)  otherwise receiving an extension of credit from the district;

(2)  must require the district to make at least three attempts by telephone or electronic mail during each week of the grace period to privately:

(A)  notify the parent of or person standing in parental relation to the student that the student's meal card or account balance is exhausted;

(B)  make arrangements with the parent or other person for payment of negative balances or amounts otherwise due, including through use of a payment plan; and

(C)  assist the parent or other person in completing an application on behalf of the student for free or reduced-price meals, if it is determined that the student may be eligible for free or reduced-price meals;

(3)  must require the district to send home with the student in an unmarked white envelope a written notice of a negative balance or other amount due and an application for free or reduced-price meals;

(4)  may not permit the district to charge a fee or interest in connection with meals purchased under Subdivision (1); and

(5) [~~(4)~~]  may permit the district to set a schedule for repayment on the account balance or other amount due if the district is unable to set a repayment schedule by agreement through efforts required under Subdivision (2) [~~as part of the notice to the parent or person standing in parental relation to the student~~].

(c)  After expiration of the grace period, the school district may:

(1)  permit the student to continue to purchase regular meals in the manner described by Subsection (b)(1); or

(2)  provide the student with alternative meals at no cost.

(d)  A school district that elects to provide alternative meals must:

(1)  privately notify the student's parent or person standing in parental relation to the student of the district's action; and

(2)  provide those meals through the same serving line as regular meals.

(e)  If a school district provides regular meals to a student under Subsection (c)(1) and is unable at the end of the school year to obtain payment for the meals from the student's parent or person standing in parental relation to the student, the district may pay the negative balance on the student's meal card or account using private donations solicited by the district from individuals and entities for that purpose and maintained in a separate district account. The amount of any private donations received under this subsection is in addition to any reimbursement to which the district is entitled under federal law.

(f)  A school district may not publicly identify a student with a negative balance on a meal card or account and must implement any action authorized under this section in a manner that does not stigmatize a student or cause embarrassment. The district's policy must identify the manner in which the district will prevent stigmatizing a student or causing embarrassment.

SECTION 2.  This Act applies beginning with the 2019-2020 school year.

SECTION 3.  This Act takes effect immediately if it receives a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this Act takes effect September 1, 2019.