



KAY IVEY
GOVERNOR

KENNETH W. BOSWELL
DIRECTOR

STATE OF ALABAMA

December 22, 2020

Mr. Kelly Butler
Director of Finance
Department of Finance
State Capitol
Montgomery, Alabama 36130

Dear Mr. Butler:

RE: Report on ADECA MOU for CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Funds
ABC for Students Program

Total expenditures entered in the ADECA accounting system for the ABC for Students program through December 18, 2020: Grants, \$19,800,607.12, and CTC \$3,408,000.00. Please see below the detail of the expenditures and program information for the ABC for Students program as of December 15, 2020.

Invoice #	Description	Amount
007738-1	July 2020	64,515.00
007815-2	August 2020	360,478.60
007984-1	September 2020	552,391.46
008035-1	October 2020	564,667.83
09000-90	November 2020	544,073.00
09001-01	December 2020	760,329.27
007790-2	Mail - Primary/Secondary tracks	189,393.68
09000-54	Mail - September	208,843.92
09000-89a	Mail - November	163,307.24
Total Invoiced		\$ 3,408,000.00

Outreach to Eligible Families

As of December 18, the program estimates that it has connected approximately 200,000 students, representing more than sixty percent of income-eligible students in the State (by

comparison, the federal government’s Lifeline broadband subsidy program reaches less than 20 percent of eligible Americans).

The program provided vouchers to eligible households through multiple strategies, including:

1. Mail vouchers sent to eligible families with information for calling to order service from participating ISPs in their area. Given the substantial percentage of inaccurate addresses in school databases, the program worked with ALSDE to update the list twice a month and to send out new letters to households whose addresses were corrected.
2. Mail vouchers sent to eligible families located where there is no participating provider, enabling them to contact us to have a hotspot delivered to their home
3. Voice vouchers provided over the phone to families who contact or are contacted by our customer service center
4. Outbound calls by ABC Ambassadors to voucher holders who have not yet redeemed their voucher to encourage them to participate in the program
5. Voucher codes provided in person by school personnel in districts that have worked with us on local strategies for engaging eligible families

In the final phase of ABC for Students, the program entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with county superintendents and provided hotspots to 11 school districts (primarily in the Black Belt) on request to distribute to those students who had not yet redeemed their vouchers. These districts, in turn, will determine the best way to reach unserved households. A summary of the devices distributed in this final phase follows:

County	No. VZW Devices	No. AT&T Devices	
Dale	0	200	
Dallas	924	825	
Etowah	5524	0	
Hale County	515	1204	
Jefferson	11839	11913	
Lowndes		940	
Marengo	531	0	
Morgan	0	3757	
Pickens	340	1006	
Pike County	350	350	
Troy City	601	795	
Total No. Devices	20,624	20,990	41,614
Total No. Children	35,061	35,683	70,744

Customer Service, Communications, and Community Outreach

The program customer service center has handled nearly 51,000 calls to date. The average hold time is less than a minute and overnight or overflow messages continue to be returned on the day received or within 24 hours.

During this phase, the program continued to engage interested school districts, with a focus on districts in the Black Belt. The program is designed to provide support, tools, and guidance to encourage family participation in ways that do not burden or tax the schools. Under this approach, 52 superintendents statewide signed a Memorandum of Agreement with ADECA expressing their interest in collaborating to expand service through ABC for Students. Participating superintendents received:

- Access to a full communications toolkit of traditional analog tools (banners, posters, etc.) and digital tools (social media strategy, Instagram maker, explanatory video and animations, etc.)
- Scripts and guidance for phone, text, and email outreach by the Superintendent to all students
- Physical distribution of voucher codes to families with first-quarter progress reports
- Development of on-campus events that provide an opportunity to sign up on site with participating ISPs

In addition, schools throughout the state were able to request a “voice voucher” by verifying in writing that a student is eligible for the National School Lunch Plan. Vouchers were typically provided over the phone within one day of receiving this request.

As noted above, the program has sent hotspots directly to 11 districts in the Black Belt to distribute to eligible households that have not yet redeemed their vouchers.

Customer Feedback

As we prepared for the program closeout, we developed two separate surveys to assess performance:

1. The first survey was designed to determine satisfaction and program success from participants (survey available [online here](#)). ABC Ambassadors contacted households that had redeemed their vouchers and conducted a brief (10-question) survey. Respondents were eager to share feedback and the program was able to complete approximately 1,800 surveys from participants. A QR code linking to the survey is included in the final mailing that all participants will receive in mid-December. Through that effort, we anticipate additional responses. At the conclusion of the survey, respondents are invited to take a speed test to assess the quality of their internet connection. This effort will enable the state to determine future infrastructure needs.
2. A second survey was developed for eligible households that did *not* redeem their vouchers (survey available [online here](#)). ABC Ambassadors continue to contact these households. As of December 17, they have completed more than 600 surveys from non-participants. This feedback will enable the State to determine ways to increase participation in future efforts.

ISPs

The program issued two separate RFIs to maximize participation by Alabama service providers. Ultimately, participants were able to redeem their voucher from 42 participating providers.

Eligible households received as many as four mailings educating them about the program and identifying participating providers in their zip code.

The program has received final invoices from all participating ISPs reflecting equipment, installation, and service charges since the inception of the program. These invoices were carefully reviewed to ensure that they accurately reflect claimed vouchers. This process required significant back-and-forth between ADECA's contractor and each provider. After verifying vouchers, ADECA's contractor forwarded recommendations to the State to process payment. These recommendations include a detailed summary of the back-and-forth with the provider and the required corrections that were made. Providers were required to submit final invoices reflecting service through the conclusion of the program (December 30) by November 30 to ensure that payment could be processed in accordance with federal funding.

Program Participation

The project has connected more than sixty percent of the approximately 300,000 students who are eligible for ABC for Students, based on income eligibility for the National School Lunch Program (This number was determined based on multiple iterations of the ALSDE database, including more than 100,000 address changes and student additions. The database was also adjusted to remove children who receive school lunches but are not eligible for ABC for Students because their lunch eligibility is automatic for their entire school rather than based on income eligibility. The voucher letter explicitly requests that recipients not use the voucher if they are not income-eligible for the NSLP.). This total includes students who contacted ABC for Students to redeem their vouchers as well as hotspots that were distributed to 11 school districts in the Black Belt under a MOA with the State in the final stage of the program.

Next Steps

ABC for Students concludes on December 30. At that time, if participants have not taken further action to continue services with their chosen provider, service will automatically terminate. Participants will not be billed for future service. The program has reached out to all 42 service providers to collect information about alternative options for ABC customers. This information has been gathered in a concise, easy-to-follow website (available [online here](#)). The site includes links to additional information by the service provider, a customer service phone number, and (where available) a brief description of alternative low-income products. The program will continue to communicate with providers and update this site as additional information is provided. Providers are also invited to communicate directly with their ABC customers about future service options (though they may not bill for continued service absent an explicit request by the customer).

The ABC for Students Ambassadors will continue to staff the customer service center through the first few weeks of January in order to ensure customers have necessary transition support post-program.

Additionally, the program is communicating with those voucher holders who returned a voucher slip via mail after November 30 to ensure they are aware that they missed the window for redeeming their voucher and to offer information about the alternative options available.

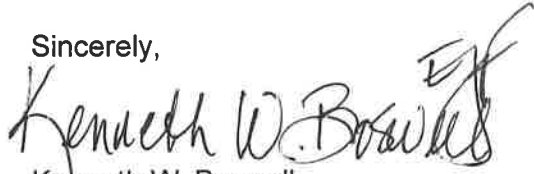
Program Spending

Spending to-date for the program has been lower than projected in part because the program has successfully negotiated lower pricing from participating ISPs than we had anticipated. Rather than an average household cost of \$400, actual costs per household are closer to \$215

(based on information to date and not including the phase 4 hotspot orders, which would lower this average number). As a result, there were cost under-runs for the program. The total dollar value of services provided by the program is \$19,800,607.12.

Please let us know if there are questions or further information is necessary.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kenneth W. Boswell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "K" and a prominent flourish at the end.

Kenneth W. Boswell
Director

KWB/tjr