



KAY IVEY
GOVERNOR

KENNETH W. BOSWELL
DIRECTOR

STATE OF ALABAMA

July 20, 2021

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

The ADECA accounting system has expended \$39,130,447.99 for the ABC for Students program through June 30, 2021. This includes \$3,843,987.14 expended for the administration of the program. The approved budget for program administration for second semester (January 2021 through June 2021) is \$1.4M. Budget projections for the entire project confirm that program expenditures are expected to be below the \$50M budget.

Please see below the detail of the expenditures and program information for the ABC for Students program as of June 30, 2021:

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
SIN000170	January - April 2021	435,987.14
Total Invoiced/Paid		3,843,987.14
Total Administrative To Date		3,843,987.14
Estimated Invoices	May/June/Project Closeout	1,013,012.86
Total Program Administration		4,857,000.00

Program Status: Termination

The ABC program provided free internet service to more than 200,000 low-income Alabama schoolchildren across 75,000 households. The program ceased accepting new customers at the end of 2020 but continued to cover monthly service fees for participating households through June 30, 2021. In June, the program focused on helping customers transition to the FCC's Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB). During this period, the Ambassador Center initiated an outbound calling effort to increase participation in the EBB. As we approached the conclusion of the ABC program, a growing percentage of the people contacted indicated that they had either signed up or were planning to sign up for the EBB. ABC Ambassadors also continued to provide customer service to existing ABC customers and to implement a customer satisfaction survey, as detailed below.

Customer Service

The program continues to operate a call center to field customer questions and concerns. From its inception, the ABC Ambassador Center has handled more than 123,500 calls (inbound and outbound). In June, the Center retained 10 Ambassadors to support ABC users in their transition to the EBB (reduced from a high of 34 call center staff). The Ambassador Center will continue to operate from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT five days a week through August 31, 2021.

The Center continued to handle both inbound and outbound calls in June. Inbound calls were primarily from ABC Customers with concerns about the program's conclusion. Ambassadors helped these callers identify alternative options. Ambassadors also made outbound calls as a courtesy to ABC families to let them know that the program was ending, administer a customer satisfaction survey, and help families sign up for the EBB. While ABC Ambassadors cannot complete the application for customers, the team continues to walk customers through the process. Now that the ABC program has concluded, the Call Center will continue to address concerns and provide guidance to former ABC customers.

As call volume slowed, Ambassadors also solicited feedback about the program through an [ABC for Students Participant Follow-up Survey \(surveymonkey.com\)](#). Ambassadors completed 1,000 surveys through these outbound calls. These responses provide important insight about the program's strengths and weaknesses and will help inform future efforts.

In the last month, Ambassadors completed nearly 13,000 outbound calls to ABC households. These calls included all ABC customers receiving service from ISPs that were *not* participating in the EBB. Program staff wanted to ensure that these households could secure service through an alternative provider, allowing for continued service through the summer. The Center will attempt to contact all 75,000 participating households by August 31, 2021. A large percentage (more than half) of those called have been both unaware that the ABC program has ended and are unfamiliar with the EBB. As such, these calls provide an important educational role for those we reach.

FCC Emergency Broadband Benefit Program

The ABC team continues to educate ABC customers about alternative low-cost internet options, particularly given the recent conclusion of the ABC for Students program. The EBB offers qualifying households a discount of up to \$50 per month toward broadband service. Because households that are eligible for the National School Lunch Program and all ABC customers

participate in the NSLP, all participating ABC households are likewise eligible for the EBB. ABC Program staff have worked closely with ISPs, the Department of Education, schools, and ABC customers to facilitate the transition to the EBB, which will allow eligible households to receive continued discounts through the summer (and perhaps beyond).

ABC Ambassadors continue to provide access to original educational materials about the EBB. These materials include a comprehensive toolkit for school administrators and correspondence with superintendents throughout the state about the EBB. The toolkit included flyers and infographics in English and Spanish for schools to distribute to students and families, a collection of social media posts to promote the program, an audio recording (MP3) (in English and Spanish) to use on local media outlets or robocalls, robocall and SMS scripts for parent outreach, and an explanatory guide about the menu of resources. Through these efforts, we have directly supported the transition of at least 1,500 ABC customers to the EBB; however, a significantly larger number of households have indicated that they plan to enroll.

ABC staff developed a variety of resources to communicate about the program's conclusion and the emergence of the EBB. These materials included:

- An email to Superintendents to prepare them for next steps
- An email to ABC Customers anticipating the conclusion of the ABC program and providing background/ instructions for enrolling in the EBB
- A variety of Website updates to alert all stakeholders and provide guidance on alternative options.
- Weekly Emails to ISPs anticipating the conclusion of the ABC, encouraging ISPs to help ABC customers transition to the EBB, and reminding them of invoice deadlines.

In addition to these materials, ABC staff continue to provide guidance and support to the 42 service providers that are participating in the ABC program. ABC staff regularly address questions from the ISPs about the relationship between ABC and the EBB and the process for helping customers transition to the new benefit at the end of the month. ABC staff have also reviewed materials that the ISPs have prepared about the transition and, in the case of some providers, have helped share this information with ABC customers (see, e.g., Verizon's website about the EBB for former ABC customers).

Invoicing

All providers were instructed to submit final invoices no later than July 15 for all services through June 30 and the program is on track to submit all invoices to the state by July 31, 2021. As of July 15, all but two providers have submitted all invoices to ABC for Students for services for January through June 30. Absent significant errors, invoices are processed and sent to ADECA within 5 business days. The two providers (Viasat and Gigafy) were contacted on July 15 with a reminder. Gigafy noted a change in management and was granted a one-day extension to return invoices. Both Viasat and Gigafy returned all missing invoices promptly.

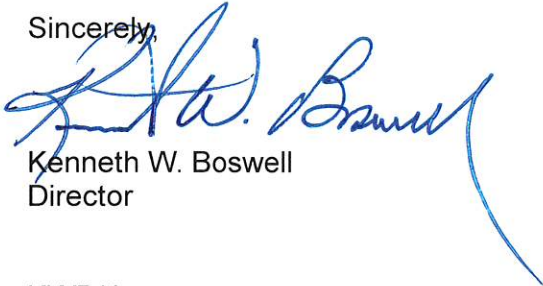
Next Steps and Program Conclusion

ABC for Students concluded on June 30, 2021. At that time, ABC families no longer received complimentary internet service from the state. Verizon hotspots were suspended (rather than terminated) at no charge. This will streamline the process for reactivating service in the future (if done so before June 30, 2022) should the Department of Education decide to pursue this option. ADECA will terminate the lines as of the end of the suspension period if the Department of Education does not determine to take up the option to manage the accounts.

The program will continue operating the call center through August 31, 2021. This will allow ABC Ambassadors to address customer questions and concerns and to educate callers about alternative service options.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "K.W. Boswell", with a long, sweeping flourish extending downwards and to the right.

Kenneth W. Boswell
Director

KWB/tjr