

MISSISSIPPI ECE LEADERS FORGE INNOVATIVE SOLUTION TO PPE DISTRIBUTION

BY LOUISE STONEY, OPPORTUNITIES EXCHANGE

January, 2021

2020 WAS A CHALLENGING YEAR FOR ALL OF US – BUT CHILD CARE PROGRAMS IN RURAL MISSISSIPPI WERE HIT ESPECIALLY HARD. THESE ISOLATED PROGRAMS WERE STRUGGLING TO FIND ESSENTIAL CLEANING SUPPLIES AND PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE), AND AN UNEXPECTED AND IMMEDIATE DECREASE IN OPERATING REVENUE MADE IT DIFFICULT TO PAY THE RISING PRICE OF THESE HIGH-DEMAND SUPPLIES. AN IMMEDIATE SOLUTION WAS NEEDED TO ENSURE THAT CHILDREN RECEIVED CARE AND EDUCATION IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT.

The Mississippi Early Learning Alliance (MELA), a joint purchasing and provider support website powered by CCA Global Partners, quickly forged a partnership with Food & Supply Source to create a solution. With support from the MS Development Authority and the MS Educational Consortium they developed a quick and efficient method to disseminate federal CARES Act funding and get essential supplies into the hands of child care providers. In three months over 110,000 items were distributed to nearly 900 locations across the state. Even more importantly, a new supply chain solution, with a 95% fill rate, was created and well-received by all involved.

A User-Friendly Approach

[The Essential Supplies Purchasing Platform](#) allowed child care operators located anywhere in the State of Mississippi to order needed supplies, free of charge, and have them shipped directly to their program. Each child care facility received a budget for purchase of essential supplies as designated by governing agency (to assure compliance with funding requirements.) Each provider's individual budget was loaded into the online platform, which restricted purchases to approved items in allowable categories such as PPE, health and safety, cleaning, and sanitation supplies.

The Essential Supplies Purchasing Platform allowed the administering partners to:

- Ensure purchases were COVID-19 compliant;
- Achieve administrative efficiency, easily allocate funds, and audit spend on demand;
- Ensure accountability, via assurances that the product is delivered only to the address of record for the registered, licensed or regulated child care program;

- Access discounted pricing for PPE, cleaning supplies, and other COVID-19 related products with delivery to individual child care providers in as little as two days, without a delivery charge, and no minimum order size; and,
- Get essential supplies in the hands of child care providers – rural and metropolitan, center- and family child care home- based programs without the state having to administer a tedious reimbursement process.

CCA For Social Good and MELA created on-line tutorials and eblast communications to educate providers on how to place orders, monitor their budgets and comply with the timeframe in which they needed to spend-down funds. Additional assistance was provided via phone and email to ensure full buy-in.

A Memorandum of Understanding outlined important details regarding deliverables of the project, who was responsible, and a timeline by which the deliverable was executed. This helped keep roles clear and the project on track. Invoicing and payment was between the governing organization and the vendor. Summary invoices were issued bi-weekly to ensure proper audit standards, limit the number of checks issued, and ensure a clean AR/AP process.

A National Opportunity

Since launch of the Mississippi solution, CCA Global has created a national [Essential Supplies Purchasing Platform](#) and protocol for states seeking to support purchasing needs. For more information, check out the [Essential Supplies Purchasing Platform FAQ](#).

Mississippi leaders engaged in this innovation solution include: Angela Bass from the Mississippi Early Learning Alliance, Cathy Grace from the Graduate Center for the Study of Early Learning, Carol Burnett from the Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Consortium, Chris Primiano at Food and Supply Source, Denise Sayer from CCA Global Partners, as well as staff from the North Mississippi Education Consortium and the Mississippi Development Authority.