



# 5 Ways to Use ESSER Funds for School Cleaning and Indoor Air Quality

Executive  
Report



An overview of how schools can use ESSER funds to clean and disinfect schools

# Executive Summary

The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund is providing a huge influx of resources for schools across America, but many schools are now struggling to decide how to spend the largely unexpected funds. While the relief package is incredibly helpful and impactful, schools will still have to make difficult decisions about how to allocate resources. Many schools are short on teachers and equipment, particularly laptops and other materials students have needed to learn from home. With COVID-19 continuing to burden schools over 18 months past the initial outbreak, many schools are choosing to allocate resources towards cleaning, disinfection, and other safety measures that will prevent the spread of disease and ensure there is a plan in place should a case occur at their school. The hope is that these measures will reduce the frequency of at-home learning, which has been difficult for teachers and students alike.

Additionally, regular facilities maintenance has effects and importance beyond preventing the spread of viruses like COVID-19. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has done extensive research and provided many resources to help parents and administrators understand how a healthy school environment affects attendance, concentration, and overall education outcomes. Indoor air quality, the use of safe chemicals for cleaning and disinfection, and mold and mildew management are just a few facilities maintenance categories that can drastically impact students. According to the CDC, asthma is one of the leading causes of school absenteeism, resulting in nearly 14 million missed school days annually. Proper facilities maintenance can reduce the number of irritants and allergens in the air that exacerbate asthma symptoms and trigger attacks.

Cleaning and improving indoor air are important not only to prevent the spread of illness, but also to maintain an environment that is conducive to a productive and enjoyable learning experience.

# About ESSER

In 2020 and 2021, Congress passed three stimulus bills that provided nearly \$190.5 billion to the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund for the purpose of providing schools with emergency relief funds to address the impact that COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, on schools across the United States. For many schools, which have been historically underfunded and lacked resources, this money gives them the opportunity to make facility updates that have been needed for years.

The funding has accumulated through three bills, colloquially called the ESSER I, II, and III bills. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, passed on March 27, 2020, provided \$13.5 billion to the ESSER Fund. The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSA), passed on Dec. 27, 2020, provided \$54.3 billion in additional funds. Finally, the most recent American Rescue Plan Act, passed on March 11, 2021, provided \$122.7 billion in supplemental ESSER funding.

The funds will be distributed based on each school's designation of Title I funding, meaning that schools in lower income states will receive more of the funds. School districts will then determine how to distribute funding among the institutions within the district.



Source: [Office of Elementary and Secondary Education](#)



## 5 Ways to Use ESSER Funds for School Cleaning and Indoor Air Quality

There are many ways schools are using their ESSER funding to make a safer learning environment through cleaning and indoor air quality improvements. To ensure a fully clean and sanitized school, we advise taking a three-pronged approach that includes regular cleaning and disinfection, deep cleaning, and periodic indoor air quality procedures. By budgeting for each of these categories, schools can minimize disruptions by ensuring all necessary measures can be taken to prevent the spread of illness and restore a safe environment quickly if an outbreak does occur.

# 5 Ways to Use ESSER Funds for School Cleaning and Indoor Air Quality

## 1. Regular Cleaning and Disinfection

How effective is your school's current cleaning routine? Do you have regular disinfection practices in place to remove the germs that spread illness? It's important to ensure that you not only have a routine in place, but that you're using tools and chemicals that are both safe and effective. The EPA has provided a list of disinfectants, List N, that are proven to kill the virus that causes COVID-19.

Regular cleaning and disinfection keep students and staff safe from germs, dirt, and dust that can cause adverse health effects. It includes removing dust, dirt, and germs from high-touch surfaces and high-traffic areas. Additionally, it keeps the school looking nice and prevents unsightly distractions.

## 2. Deep Cleaning

A deep cleaning should be completed periodically to address any areas that are difficult to clean while school is in session. Some of these services require wait periods in which the surfaces can't be walked upon or would otherwise disrupt students and staff, which is why they are often completed over breaks. A deep cleaning usually includes carpet cleaning and extraction, strip and floor wax, high dusting, and tile scrubbing, among several other services.

These services help to maintain the school and prevent the buildup of dirt and grime. Hard-to-reach places like cafeteria rafters may go unnoticed on a day-to-day basis, but they can quickly acquire enough dust to become unsightly and pose a health risk. Deep cleans address every surface of the school and bring it back to life after a semester of heavy use.

## 3. Periodic Disinfection

Periodic disinfection isn't something most schools considered important before the Coronavirus outbreak. However, it's now just as essential as regular cleaning. Periodic disinfection means having a plan in place and a service provider in the event of a COVID-19, or other virus outbreak, event at your school. High-quality providers have access to advanced technology, such as electrostatic sprayers, that are safe and effective for killing the germs that cause viruses. Periodic disinfection should be used as both a prevention strategy (not just for COVID-19, but also for the flu and common cold) and an emergency response.

InfectaGuard™ Plus is our one-time in-depth deep cleaning and disinfection service that gives you the peace of mind that your facility is disinfected with EPA-approved List N antimicrobial disinfectants that prevent the spread of germs that cause infections such as influenza and COVID-19.

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## 4. Long-Lasting Surface Protection

Even if you prioritize frequently disinfecting high-touch areas, it's impossible to ensure they are wiped down between each person touching them. Fortunately, we now have the technology to protect surfaces for a longer time period. Continuous Care uses cutting-edge technology to disinfect and create a long-lasting antimicrobial coating and surface protectant that is applied after cleaning is complete. The disinfectant and antimicrobial coating used with Continuous Care is an EPA List N approved disinfectant, confirmed to be effective in killing SARS-CoV-2, the virus associated with COVID-19. Applying it with an electrostatic sprayer provides 360-degree coverage, killing viruses and inhibiting the growth of bacteria and microorganisms.

## 5. Indoor Air Quality

Properly operating ventilation is important for the health and wellbeing of everyone at the school. For school leaders, it's important to consider Ventilation Mitigation Strategies as part of the disinfection process. Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) monitoring devices report on the levels of common pollutants and other air conditions in real-time. They can also help reduce costs by identifying areas of overspending on heat and air conditioning and improve employee happiness by increasing air quality. Portable air cleaners can help reduce airborne contaminants, including particles containing viruses. They may be particularly helpful when additional ventilation with outdoor air is not possible without compromising indoor comfort (temperature or humidity), or when outdoor air pollution is high.

However, an air filter is not enough by itself to fully protect people from COVID-19. The CDC recommends HEPA fan/filtration systems be used only to enhance air cleaning, especially in high-risk areas. Dry Hydrogen Peroxide (DHP) systems turn humidity from the air into hydrogen peroxide that can safely and effectively reduce microbes in the air. It is safe for human exposure and can be used in occupied settings. It is an effective no-touch addition to a manual cleaning process and can assist with ongoing decontamination in high-traffic areas.



# Budgeting and Getting Started with a Facilities Maintenance Program

If you plan to devote more of your resources to facilities maintenance this year, you'll need to get buy-in from leadership. Presenting them with information about the importance of cleanliness and disinfection for a successful school year is a great way to help them understand why it's a good investment. However, they will likely also need to see a plan and a budget.

## 1. Create a committee of advocates

Transforming your facilities maintenance schedule is a big undertaking, and it's helpful to have multiple people to help. Create a diverse team with people from all areas of the school that can bring up questions you may not have considered.

## 2. Create a budget

It's likely that you'll be asked about a budget before anything else. Call OpenWorks today, and we'll be happy to discuss our facilities management services and packages with you.

## 3. Identify priorities

Transforming your facilities maintenance procedures may come down to compromise. Have a list of items you believe you absolutely must have to create a safe learning environment and a separate list of "nice-to-have" services that could be done less frequently or added later.

## 4. Have a plan

You may be asked about the logistics of regular cleaning or emergency disinfection, for example. Ask your facilities management provider about how they usually handle those situations so you can give an informed response. Ask about areas that may be off-limits while cleaning, when deep cleanings and disinfections can be scheduled, how often air filters must be changed, and how often each service is required.

## 5. Educate faculty, staff, and students

Once you have buy-in from leadership, you'll need to ensure faculty, staff, parents, and students are also educated on the new cleaning and disinfection practices. For example, you may ask students and teachers to periodically disinfect high-touch surfaces like door knobs. Older students can help by wiping down shared learning materials and younger students can begin learning how to wash their hands correctly. Everyone needs to be involved to create a safe place to learn!

# Choosing the Right Provider

It's important to find a commercial cleaning provider that understands the unique needs of schools. OpenWorks offers a number of specialized solutions for schools to safely complete your summertime deep clean and ongoing cleaning, disinfection and indoor air quality checks throughout the school year. Our staff are experienced in working with schools, so we understand the importance of communication and scheduling to prevent disruption.

Our TotalWorks™ commercial cleaning solutions for educational facilities include:

- Background Checks Upon Request
- Local/Corporate Oversight & QA Program
- Comprehensive Educational Facility Training To Meet State Requirements
- Reliable And Responsive Solutions To Accommodate Your Break Schedules
- Environmentally-Friendly Green Clean Program
- OSHA Certified Service Providers
- Classroom Disinfection And Maintenance
- Restroom Disinfection And Maintenance
- Hard Floor Disinfection And Maintenance
- Carpet Care
- Office Cleaning And Disinfection
- Athletic Disinfection And Maintenance
- Day Custodian Services
- HVAC/Indoor Air Quality (IAQ)







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