

School facility repairs and improvements can enable schools to reduce risk of virus transmission and exposure to environmental health hazards, and to support student health needs.

To help our clients understand how existing government funding relates to school facility repairs, here are some helpful resources.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/building-water-system.html#mold>, Guidance for Reopening Buildings After Prolonged Shutdown or Reduced Operation (updated on September 22, 2020), provides guidance on mold “awareness, monitoring, and remediation during and after prolonged building shutdowns.”

“Mold will grow on building materials where there is moisture, produced from leaks or condensation from roofs, windows, or pipes, or from a flood. Mold can grow on a variety of surfaces, such as ceiling tiles, wallpaper, insulation, drywall, carpet and fabric. People with asthma and other respiratory conditions and those with mold allergy or weakened immune systems should avoid buildings suspected or confirmed to have mold contamination. Ensure that your building does not have mold after a prolonged shutdown to maintain a safe working environment for returning occupants.”

If dampness or mold is detected, the source of water entry needs to be discovered and then remediated to maintain a safe working environment for occupants.

As posted on the **Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE)** website, https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/01/Final_ESSERII_Factsheet_1.5.21.pdf, the ESSER II Fact Sheet outlines the allowable uses of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) II funds under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act:

- * School facility *repairs and improvements* to enable operation of schools to reduce risk of virus transmission *and exposure to environmental health hazards*, and to support student health needs
- * Inspection, testing, maintenance, repair, replacement and upgrade *projects to improve the indoor air quality in school facilities*, including mechanical and nonmechanical heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems; filtering, purification and other air cleaning; fans; control systems; and window and door repair and replacement
- * Other activities that are necessary to *maintain the operation* of and continuity of services in local educational agencies and continuing to employ existing staff of the local educational agency

As you will note, the document states, “virus transmission *and* exposure to environmental health hazards.” This statement addresses other hazards in addition to the COVID-19 virus. It also allows for “**projects to improve the indoor air quality**” (IAQ) which does not *exclude* addressing roofing and building envelope leaks that lead to water infiltration and subsequent poor IAQ. It also allows for the funds to be used to “maintain the operation” of the facility. Identifying, repairing and maintaining your building and creating a safe, healthy, dry environment is necessary to keep your facilities operational and provide the best learning environment possible.

ARP ESSER FACTS

In addition, regarding funds under the recent **American Rescue Plan Act (ARP)**, which includes ESSER III funding, the U.S. Department of Education Fact Sheet https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/03/FINAL_ARP-ESSER-FACT-SHEET.pdf, states, “ARP ESSER funds may be used to develop strategies and implement public health protocols including, to the greatest extent practicable, policies in line with *guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)* on reopening and operating schools to effectively maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other staff, as well as:

- * Repairing and improving school facilities to reduce risk of virus transmission and exposure to environmental health hazards
- * Improving indoor air quality
- * Providing students and staff with safe school reopenings that align with public health guidance

(See CDC article referenced above.)

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS — WHY IT MATTERS

While it is crucial that ventilation systems be kept in a clean, hygienic state, an airtight building envelope, including roofs, allows the ventilation system to work more effectively, thus providing better controlled air movements and environmental conditions. A properly functioning roof and building envelope will help reduce allergens from mold caused by water intrusion from leaks and condensation.

While the focus of the original ESSER funding was on COVID-19 related assistance, and continuing to utilize funds for COVID-19 related items is critical, other environmental hazards must continue to be addressed as they may result in allergic reactions and more serious illness. In an environment where a poor roof and/or building envelope is present, the ventilation effectiveness may be significantly impaired and a variety of IAQ issues may arise. The impacts to environmental conditions (temperature/relative humidity) and ventilation may also adversely affect steps taken to minimize risk of spreading COVID-19.

The upkeep of your roofing and building envelope components can help ensure that building occupants are in a safe and healthy classroom environment. Poor IAQ has been tied to symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, trouble concentrating and other related effects. A building envelope system that allows uncontrolled water into the interstitial space, allows for active mold, fungus growth, and poor indoor air quality or sick building syndrome. Faculty, staff and student exposure to a poor indoor air environment can produce flu-like illness. In today's pandemic environment, this can lead to further shutdowns of the building and testing for COVID-19.



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