

ESSER FUNDS

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ESSER Funds

Over two years ago, North America looked on as many countries in the east were experiencing the trauma of COVID-19 which we believed would not reach us here. As the first cases hit the United States in January 2020, a sudden realization that this pandemic was not avoidable set in. As the entire world went into lockdown, governments jumped into action, attempting to salvage economies and their citizens' mental health. ESSER Funds became a part of this quest for normalcy and reconciliation. Although it is recognized that this journey will take a lot longer than originally expected, Flexxform is a part of this fight and is prepared to assist in the fight to return to a better world.

What are ESSER Funds?

As a result of the economic and mental strains COVID-19 has caused, the U.S. Congress has passed six different relief packages. These packages are to assist businesses and individuals that are feeling the effects of the struggling economy. Among these six packages, three are stimulus packages for elementary and secondary schools, entitled the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds or ESSER Funds. These funds were created under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (herein “CARES Act”), Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (herein “CRRSA Act”), and American Rescue Plan Act, (herein “ARP Act”). These three acts were passed during the years 2020 and 2021.

About Each ESSER Fund:

ESSER I:

The original ESSER Fund was passed as a part of the CARES Act. The CARES Act was implemented to assist with many issues related to COVID-19, but primarily it provided direct

economic assistance for businesses, schools, and more (U.S Department of the Treasury, 2021). The passing of this act allocated \$13.5 billion to assist in emergency relief for schools. The distribution of these funds commenced in May 2020 and was concluded in September 2021 (Bernstein, 2021).

The U.S. Department of Education provides a comprehensive table that goes over exactly what each ESSER fund can be used for. ESSER I broadly mentions that it may be used for the prevention, preparation, and response to COVID-19 (U.S Department of Education, 2021).

ESSER II:

Following the initiation of the original ESSER Funds, the U.S. Congress passed the CRRSA Act. The CRRSA Act was an extension of the CARES act, adding additional phases, allocations, and guidance regarding the ongoing fight against COVID-19. Alongside additional funds, the CRRSA also added clauses to assist with the hiring and laying off staff (U.S Department of Education, 2021). Once this act was passed, it became the foundation for the second ESSER funds. ESSER II allocated \$54.3 billion to schools. These funds began their distribution in March 2021 and will be finalized by September 2022 (Bernstein, 2021).

ESSER III:

The final ESSER funds were passed with the ARP Act. The ARP Act is an act to turn the economy around and help citizens find their way back to normalcy. Included in this normalcy is the safe reopening of schools (The White House, 2021). To assist with this, ESSER III, or ARP ESSER, has promised just under \$122.7 billion to education facilities. These funds began their distribution in May or 2021 and will continue to be allocated throughout the following two years, concluding in September 2023 (Bernstein, 2021).

In addition to the terms of both ESSER I and ESSER II, ESSER III also states that at least 20% of the funds received must be used to address the learning loss inflicted upon students by

COVID-19 (U.S Department of Education, 2021). It specifies that addressing learning loss can be defined as interventions that assist in responding to the effects of COVID-19 on students' academic, social, and emotional needs (U.S Department of Education, 2021). It is recommended that there is an implementation of any tools or programs that may assist in reconciling any gaps the pandemic created in students' education and mental stability.

Conclusion

All three ESSER funds were created to assist in the redevelopment of the economy, individuals, businesses, and schools. Not only are they there to provide hope and assurance, but also an attempt to rein in and control the spread and impact of COVID-19.

Purchasing Flexxform Products with ESSER Funds

The ESSER Funds can be used in many ways. One particular use of the ESSER funds is in the purchase of tools that can assist educators in stopping the spread of COVID-19. Although there are many, below are three main points within the ESSER Funds purchasing guide of which Flexxform can be of assistance:

1. Providing mental health services and supports
2. Improving school facilities to help reduce the risk of virus transmission
3. Assisting with the addressing of student learning loss

Providing Mental Health Services & Supports

With standard, pre-COVID-19 budgets, finding extra funds to assist in the fight against mental illness has been a struggle for many educators. But with the three ESSER fund acts, an opportunity has been presented to educators to provide more for students.

Studies show that there are at least five factors in specific environments that can affect mental

states; Aesthetics, sensory, people, culture and values, and familiarity (Lindberg, 2021). Factors like what the five senses experience can affect atmospheres and directly impact a person's mental health. And although Flexxform can't provide better lighting, comforting furniture can positively impact a student's mood, which, as mentioned before, plays a large role in impacting their mental health.

Having an outward environment of comfort and ease will not cure mental illness but can assist in alleviating the discomfort one feels inside. And this is where Flexxform can provide tools.

Flexxform's products are designed to ensure every user is comfortable and can relax. Namely, the Lax or Tub collections, for different relaxation techniques like de-escalation and pressure therapy. But of course, all Flexxform products are constructed with long-lasting quality and comfort.

Improving School Facilities to Help Reduce the Risk of Virus Transmission

Cleanability is a key factor that Flexxform builds into every piece constructed. It is ensured that every detail within the construction is built in a particular way, allowing Flexxform's products to have the utmost cleanability.

A few specific examples are:

1. Every seam in the Flexxform products is double stitched with the use of India tape. India tape is an adhesive that, when stitched alongside the upholstery, fills in the microscopic spaces between the thread and the upholstery. This provides a barrier against bed bugs, viruses, mold, bacteria, and moisture.
2. Flexxform stocks and recommends the J Ennis Challenger vinyl, which is a healthcare-grade vinyl. The Challenger vinyl is bleach cleanable and can be cleaned using many different disinfectants and cleaners. This ease of cleanability plays a huge role in reducing the risk of virus transmission.
3. Flexxform's graded-in upholstery is made up of healthcare grade, easy-to-clean vinyl, and high-

performance fabrics. Again, this assists in reducing the risk of virus transmissions as the majority of these upholsteries can be cleaned with bleach and/or other disinfectants.

Assisting With the Addressing of Student Learning Loss

Flexible seating is now a common term amongst educators. Although not all have belief in the concept, it is becoming more popular in education settings. These flexible seating settings support students in their learning, by allowing the students to take control of their surroundings, in turn encouraging them to take control of their learning. Included in every flexible classroom is some form of soft seating. This speaks to students who may struggle to focus when sitting on hard plastic chairs.

Not only that, but since the end of the 2019/2020 school year, students have been learning from home. This means they have been completing schoolwork on their bed, a couch, or perhaps even the floor. The transition from learning on the comfort of their bed or couch to a standard hard task chair with a hard desk could be hindering their learning, with the loss of external comfort.

A few factors of coming back to school could hinder students who have experienced learning loss, and Flexxform provides a solution for each:

1. **Being uncomfortable:** Asking a student, who has been sitting, or perhaps lying, on a couch or bed to complete their learning, to sit on a hard chair could be asking them to take a step back. As mentioned earlier, Flexxform is all about creating comfortable seating for children and adults. The Junior size seating, or 14” seat height, is built to ensure younger students can experience the same comforts as older students, all while experiencing a chair with the same quality as the senior size, 18” seat height, chairs. And with that comes high-density foam, which provides comfort for many years.
2. **Social Anxiety:** With the lack of social interaction throughout COVID-19, many children have been faced with an obstacle they will have to overcome: Interaction with others. Without

standard interactions these last years, many young people have found it a challenge to fit in socially. This leads to social anxiety. When in an uncomfortable environment, physically, it simply heightens the anxiety. Whereas with a comfortable physical environment, by providing things like couches, children are automatically put at physical ease, which can translate to lower anxiety.

3. The Strain of COVID-19 in General: Obviously, COVID-19 has added to everyone's anxiety.

With the combination of fearing the unknown and fearing the virus itself, many people have seen a shift of spending more time being anxious and worrying about their futures. Everyone's nerves are a little more on edge, and although they may not understand, children can sense this and can take on these feelings as their own. Confusion, concern, and fear of the unknown can lead students to experience more anxiety than normal. And again, Flexxform can provide a calming, comfortable physical environment that will assist educators in easing the anxiety of their students.

Conclusion

All three of these factors, which Flexxform can help with, are only the start of attempting to bring in reconciliation after what COVID-19 has brought on families, individuals, education, and businesses. And although complete healing will take time, the point of the ESSER funds is to get a head start in that healing process and find some form of normalcy again. What better than cleanable sofas, that will not only assist in stopping the transmission of the virus but support educators in easing the mental dilemma felt by all in these uncertain times.

Summary of Report

Flexxform believes that better times are around the corner. With the assistance of governments and

acts like the ESSER funds, it is believed that not only can the world return to a new state of normalcy, but it can become a better normal. Forward-thinking and hope will turn this around and Flexxform is here to assist you in stopping the spread and providing comfort for those who need it. Make sure to check your respective state's Department of Education website to learn more about how ESSER Funds can assist you and your customers.

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