

# Vinyl Siding Institute (VSI) Helps Prepare the Workforce of the Future: Starting with Grades K-12

*It's "back to school" time! VSI's Workforce Development programs have been tailored to help the next generation of students "unlock a future with no limits."*

ALEXANDRIA, VA, US, August 21, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- By 2031, over 40% of today's skilled

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*Eric Cotterman*

trades workers will retire from the workforce, clearing the way for 3 million career opportunities as early as 2028. The [Vinyl Siding Institute's](#) (VSI's) [Workforce Development programs](#) have been tailored to help the next generation of students “unlock a future with no limits.” In addition to helping existing professionals transition from other trades or out of the military to become vinyl siding installers, these programs are designed to integrate nicely with course offerings at trade schools and high school JVS (Joint Vocational Services) curriculums.

The VSI's commitment to education and advocacy in reaching students starts at the top.

“The most meaningful day on the job for me in the last several months was the day I had the privilege of combining my personal and professional lives by pulling together a panel on careers in the skilled trades at my son's high school,” said Kate Offringa, VSI's President & CEO. “As Vice President of our high school PTA this past school year, I can tell you that the skilled trades panel had by far the most student attendees of any program we organized. The level of interest was very high. And the students felt that we were offering information that could directly impact their lives in a positive way.”

According to Offringa, students who attended her vinyl siding installer training presentation also heard from the Leading Builders of America trade association on career paths in the trades. Local skilled tradesmen who own businesses also spoke about how much they enjoyed their work while making a good living. Spanish language interpreters supported the event and headsets were available for students who needed interpretation.

“The group paid attention and asked good questions,” Offringa noted. “We invited an official

from our county who works for a program that connects young people to jobs in our area, so students made a connection with someone who can help them act on what they learned. Kids are really interested when you show them a path.

### Lighting the Path to Future Professional Success

VSI gets excited about stories like Offringa's because there are a few obstacles to overcome to reach tomorrow's trade professionals while they are still in high school. While we are starting to see more trade organizations at high school college/career fairs, most high schools' success is still measured by the number of students they are advancing into 4-year universities.

"We don't have many contractors visiting our high schools or building relationships with guidance counselors," said Rob Balfanz, Vice President, Siding, Home Improvements, Workforce Development at Progressive Foam. "We have some excellent career development tools to share and some amazing stories to inspire our youth. Once we figure out how to best partner with the high schools, there really are 'no limits.'"

As VSI's former Director of Workforce Development, Balfanz helped initiate many of VSI's partnerships with trade schools and high schools, using new tools like "The [Ladder to Success](#)" graphic that shows what a lucrative career as a VSI-certified installer can look like. In addition to convincing high school leaders and counselors to keep an open mind about careers in the trades, Rob believes that we must change the narrative at home.

"Parents are still sitting at the dinner table and talking to their kids about college," he said. "That's fine, but we should be having conversations about what our children are good at, what skill sets they have and what their interests and passions are."

In addition to the home conversation, the construction industry must overcome common misperceptions of those working in a built environment. Balfanz and others in the vinyl siding industry agree that when most of society catches a glimpse of people working on a job site, their first impression is that these people are not following their plan A.

"We need to market the truth – that many of these people are following a professional path – especially our certified vinyl siding installers – that could lead to six-figure incomes and business ownership in 5-10 years."

Eric Cotterman, Senior Product/Installation Trainer for Cornerstone Building Brands, believes that the VSI Workforce Development program has the tools to show students a clear path to future success in the trades.

"We have a curriculum any school would accept," Cotterman said. "We have a complete toolbox to arm the educators so that they can show students what our careers look like, including the potential for income and personal and professional growth. You can start early in the grade

schools by giving students tape measures and (safe) tools to learn how to use.”

He believes that – for schools that are more focused on STEM there is a potential knowledge gap in the holistic approach for all learners to find their place after traditional K-12, whether that is in college, community college or a trade. Students need to find their own paths with the help of educators and a curriculum that expands their knowledge and challenges their personalized skills and abilities. And more importantly, they must realize that not all paths are the same for each person.

“They could even serve a 7-8-week summer school apprenticeship program separate from the traditional school year curriculum,” Cotterman said. “And with the influx of open teaching jobs, schools could tap into former tradespeople to fill these roles.”

The remodeling sector is projected to skyrocket in the next decade due to historic new homebuilding construction from 2005-2010. It behooves all carpenters, contractors and trade associations to hit the high schools hard in the next couple of years with trusted voices that can show students what clear paths to exciting, lucrative careers in vinyl siding and other homebuilding trades could mean for them.

Lisa C. Dunn  
Vinyl Siding Institute (VSI)  
ldunn@vinylsiding.org

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