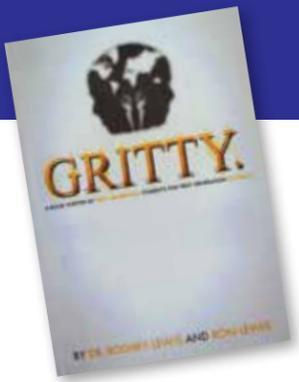


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SCHOOL SUCCESS REQUIRES GRIT

Former Rockwood Students Author Book for Pupils on How to Be *Gritty*

Principal Rodney Lewis, a former VICC participant, stands with his Ballwin Elementary School students. He is an award winning educator and co-author of the book, *Gritty*.



When 35-year-old former VICC participant Rodney Lewis reflects on how far he has come in life, he sometimes shakes his head in disbelief. Raised in a community of violence, drugs and gangs, his low college entrance test scores testified to his strategy of taking the easiest path and putting in the least amount of effort. His poor scores only amplified his recurring feelings of self-doubt. Now flash forward to the present. Lewis holds multiple advanced degrees, authored a book, and has climbed high in the education field. He was named top area school administrator in the Excellence in Education awards sponsored by St. Louis Magazine.

What caused this transformation, you wonder? A lot of soul searching and something called "grit." Rodney and his twin brother Ron, who also struggled in his early years but went on to make remarkable achievements,

document their low points and challenges in their book, titled *Gritty*, to motivate others. Their thinking is, "If we can do it, you can do it," and *Gritty* provides the rationale and how-to's.

In some education circles, "grit" is considered to be the key to student success. The idea is that passion and persistence are essential characteristics to possess, maybe more so than intelligence or the ability to learn quickly and easily. The Lewis twins contend that grit is absolutely necessary to get ahead, especially for those who grow up in impoverished and dangerous neighborhoods as they did.

The twins' book gives first generation college students strategies for overcoming adversity and creating success in their lives. They speak from their own experiences as first generation college students, defined by them as being the first in one's immediate family to attend

college and whose parents do not hold college degrees. They use their missteps as teachable moments for young people who share their same background.

Because of their successes, these 1999 graduates of Rockwood's Lafayette High School have been the topic of past articles where the focus was on their experiences in Rockwood schools which, they say, served them well. They benefitted from the diverse population, the rigorous academics and the faculty who bolstered and groomed them. According to Rodney, the academics were such that the young men had "to put in extra work." This was their early introduction to the concept of grit--a mindset they would struggle with at times but eventually master. They earned not only bachelor's degrees, but master's and even doctorate degrees.

Ron is a consultant with PQC (Ft. Wayne, IN). He provides leadership training for the organization's Midwest clients. Rodney is principal at Ballwin Elementary School in the Rockwood district. In addition to their full-time jobs, they have a consulting business, The Lewis Influence, where they offer inspiration and advice to students.

The Excellence in Education award that Rodney won (first place, "administration" category) from St. Louis Family (produced by St. Louis Magazine) recognizes hard work, determination and dedication. Those are the very characteristics he and his brother emphasize in their book. They define "gritty" as having the strength and resilience to overcome obstacles and reach one's goals. They write, "Grit is believing in yourself when the environment is screaming otherwise. It is never quitting when self-doubt is having a long conversation with you. Grit is believing in the unbelievable and doing the unthinkable."

While *Gritty* is targeted to first generation college students, its general principals are useful for anyone and especially young people who could use some impassioned motivation from a couple of guys who have walked in their shoes. Visit the twins' website to order the book: www.lewflu.com.

The following are words of wisdom, extracted from *Gritty*, applicable to all students:

Don't just want something (good grades, a dream job, a slick car); you have to EXPECT that it can become a reality. The stronger the expectation level, the more you will be willing and ready to do whatever it takes to make it happen.

If you are capable of making A's, don't settle for B's or C's! Opt for "hard and necessary" instead of "easy and convenient."

You must create good habits (study time, sleep time, powering through challenges, resilience) in order to be successful.

Take ownership of your learning as though your life depended on it (and it does!)

Know your numbers: credit hours, class grades, GPA. Understand where you are and where you need to be.

Don't blame the teacher for your poor grades. Remember: own your education; it's not the teacher's doing, it's what YOU do.

Look closely at the people you hang with. They should be focused and positive just like you, not people who will negatively drive you down

the wrong path. Surround yourself with good people.

If you abuse freedom, you will lose freedom. Make smart decisions.

Use your time wisely. There are better outcomes for your future if you are "grinding for good grades" instead of goofing off.

Mental strength is important.

Believe in yourself. "If you don't believe, you can't achieve." You will have setbacks (that's only natural!), but what is important is that you dust yourself off and try again...and again...and again.

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OUTSTANDING

Graduates

AFFTON

Affton High School

DeVontae Burse was a determined, hardworking and goal-oriented student athlete. He was voted Homecoming King which attests to how well his peers and faculty like and respect him. A standout in football, DeVontae distinguished himself by being a record breaking athlete. He will study business at Missouri Western University where he will play football.

BAYLESS

Bayless High School

Taylor Owens was an exceptional student leader with an outstanding academic record. She was an active member of the Student Council and participated in the Leadership class, both which produced successful events that contributed to the school and community at large. Taylor was part of the Bayless dance team and served as captain. She led her team to become State Champions in Hip Hop in 2016. A hard working student, Taylor took advanced and college dual credit classes, in addition to completing the requirements of the Missouri A+ program. She will attend Missouri State University to study Physical Therapy.

BRENTWOOD

Brentwood High

Nigel Bracey developed into a man of character and leadership at Brentwood. He is an honest, genuine, charismatic and approachable young man, respected by both peers and staff. Striving to make Brentwood High a better place, he actively participated in class leadership, helping to plan events and volunteer opportunities for his classmates. He was a member of the basketball team (four years), baseball team, National Honor Society and Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He was selected to attend the Missouri Scholars Academy and was a camp counselor and mentor for the middle school's eighth grade camp. Nigel will attend Washington University (Mesmer scholarship recipient) to study engineering.

CLAYTON

Clayton High School

Chinyere (Chi-Chi) Onwumere is a strong and confident writer who loves the study of languages and culture as much as she loves science and math. Chi-Chi prepared herself for the rigors of a pre-med program in college by volunteering at a local hospital, taking advanced placement courses and engaging in experiences that broadened her horizons. She is a diligent problem solver, motivated by each new challenge. She plans to study neuroscience at either Washington University or Duke University.

HANCOCK

Hancock Place High School

Michaela Smith was very involved in academics, extracurriculars and community service. She participated in volleyball and cheerleading, as well as Student Council and the yearbook committee. Additionally, she served as a teacher's assistant and student mentor.

This summer, Michaela will move to Texas where she plans to attend Park University and study criminal justice.

KIRKWOOD

Kirkwood High School

Being a four-year recipient of Kirkwood's African-American Achievement Award attests to **Dina Alabsew's** hard work and dedication in the classroom. A member of the National Honor Society, she also excelled extracurricularly and exhibited leadership skills. She was a freshman class officer, a member of the women's choir and participated in Peer Helpers, a club that trains selected students to assist their peers with problem solving and conflict mediation. Dina will attend the University of Louisville.

LINDBERGH

Lindbergh High School

Performing in the school band while also playing on the football team takes a special kind of student and **Brandon Rice** was that student. All four years of high school, he played trumpet in the marching band and was the defensive tackle for the Flyers. Despite that grueling commitment, he earned good grades. In the spring time, he participated in track and field. Brandon will study biochemistry at Mizzou and ultimately hopes to become a medical doctor.

MEHLVILLE

Mehlville High School

Tamir Pruitt challenged herself by taking several honors and college dual credit courses. She discovered her love of culinary arts and pursued this interest at South County Technical High in her junior and senior years. Tamir's dedication and ambition will serve her well as she plans to continue her studies in the culinary arts at Johnson and Wales University and is also enlisted in the Missouri National Guard.

Oakville High School

Bright, curious and determined, **Sara'Ann Patterson** demonstrated a pursuit of excellence in the classroom while following a college preparatory curriculum including honors, college dual credit and AP classes. This consistent honor roll designee was a talented and dedicated member of the choir and drama programs. She was active in the Spanish club and Spanish National Honor Society, plus served as a cadet-teacher in Spanish I. She has been a bell ringer for the Salvation Army, a volunteer with a burn recovery support group and a participant in TREND. Later in high school, she held a job as well. Sara'Ann plans to attend Northwest Missouri State University and is considering a career in education.

PARKWAY

Parkway Central High School

Headed to Southeast Missouri State University to study early childhood education, **Kaytlyn Sneed** feels confident that she is well prepared. The personal responsibility she honed in Parkway will be invaluable to her in college, she believes. In addition, the diversity she was exposed to

encouraged her to move outside her comfort zone. Successfully adapting to the challenges of attending a school far beyond her neighborhood gave Kaytlyn a new-found confidence which she parlayed into being tapped for South's competitive Step Team squad.

Parkway North High School

The qualities of a student leader are immediately recognizable in **Ria Smith** who points to Parkway as her gateway to a diverse and culturally rich academic experience. Ria's immersion into the Parkway school community is evident in her multitude of involvements: varsity softball and lacrosse, mock trial, captains council (supporting the Chesterfield Police Department in keeping North drug free and safe), the Sister to Sister support club for African-American females, and ASAP (African-American Student Acceleration program). She will attend University of Illinois-Chicago and focus on pre-law.

Parkway South High School

Domonisha Williams says, above all, she learned perseverance from participating in the VICC program, and as a result, she is a force to be reckoned with as she moves forward. All four years she attended Special Olympics. Pushed to take challenging classes, she did so, and while they didn't always result in an A, the take-away for her was that grit and perseverance are essential to achievement. This tenacity has helped Domonisha map out her goals which include enrollment in Forest Park Community College (through the Missouri A+ program) to major in early childhood education.

Parkway West High School

Donte Hopkins has an insatiable appetite for knowledge as reflected in his many involvements: the experiential learning program, SPARK!, the Chess Club, Captains Council (supporting the Chesterfield Police Department in keeping West drug free and safe), ASAP (African-American Student Acceleration program), and the Superintendent's Social Justice Leadership Advisory Council. With a future goal of attaining a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership, Donte will attend the University of Missouri to major in elementary education.

ROCKWOOD

Eureka High School

The impressive **Amina Muhando** was an integral part of the student group, Eureka Equity, participating in student panels for staff and other activities designed to educate the Wildcat community about embracing diversity. During her four-year participation, she demonstrated extraordinary levels of self-awareness and modeled how to think critically and also reflect on issues of culture and social justice. After being identified for AP classes due to her studiousness and strong work ethic, Amina excelled in upper-level classes. This honor roll student also excelled artistically, showcasing her artwork in the school art show and winning the poster design competition. A thoughtful leader and wise beyond her years, Amina's dedication to fellow students and to teaching others about the power

of love are an inspiration. Her plans are to study nursing at UMSL.

Lafayette High School

Excelling academically and athletically, **Kaleea Johnson** was a dedicated, active member of the school community. She earned excellent grades, ran track, served as a cadet teacher and was a Student of the Month award winner. Kaleea is dependable, determined and creative. She has amazing communication skills and a very caring personality. She plans to study elementary education at Columbia College where she will be part of the track and field team.

Marquette High School

Cortiny Scruggs was a strong member of the Marquette school community, both academically and extracurricular wise. An annual recipient of the VICC academic achievement award, she ran track for several years and was an office aid for two. As co-captain of the Step Team, she demonstrated her leadership ability by helping organize events and competitions. She received the Celebration of Excellence award from Marquette's department of Family and Consumer Science. Cortiny is headed to UMSL to major in Fashion and Design and minor in Business Administration.

Rockwood Summit High School

Tim Hall is an outstanding young man and one of the finest students at Summit. He earned a full scholarship to play football at Missouri Western University where he hopes to study business and then go into real estate if he does not get a chance to play football in the NFL. He would like to pursue a master's degree in business as well. Tim was awarded the teacher-selected Falcon Flight award which recognizes academic and athletic achievement, leadership, community service and volunteer work.

VALLEY PARK

Valley Park High School

The high achieving **Cidney Grimes** maintained excellent grades while taking honors, college dual credit and AP classes. A leader in her class, she was an award-winning member of Future Business Leaders of America. She also served as secretary for the National Honor Society, captain of the track team and was involved in other school activities. She was awarded the Multicultural Leadership Scholarship from Missouri State University, where she will continue her education in public relations.

WEBSTER GROVES

Webster Groves High School

Carolyn Ross demonstrated her strength and endurance both in school and on the track team. She participated in the community service-focused Interact Club as well as Future Leaders and being a gifted athlete, earned a track scholarship to UMKC where she plans to major in pre-pharmacy. She was awarded the Webster Groves Family and Friends scholarship and also received a scholarship from the high school parents' club.



DeVontae Burse
Affton High School



Taylor Owens
Bayless High School



Nigel Bracey
Brentwood High School



Chinyere Onwumere
Clayton High School



Michaela Smith
Hancock Place High School



Dina Alabsew
Kirkwood High School



Brandon Rice
Lindbergh High School



Tamir Pruitt
Mehlville High School



Sara'Ann Patterson
Oakville High School



Kaytlyn Sneed
Parkway Central High School



Ria Smith
Parkway North High School



Domonisha Williams
Parkway South High School



Donte Hopkins
Parkway West High School



Amina Muhando
Eureka High School



Kaleea Johnson
Lafayette High School



Cortiny Scruggs
Marquette High School



Tim Hall
Rockwood Summit High School



Cidney Grimes
Valley Park High School



Carolyn Ross
Webster Groves High School

Message from the CEO



Certainly, one of the goals of participating in the voluntary interdistrict choice program is to graduate from high school and, ultimately, continue one's education at college or in the development of a career. This issue highlights our outstanding graduates of 2016. We are proud of their hard work and accomplishments and wish them the very best in their future opportunities. As I studied these bios, I was struck by a number of the adjectives describing what led to their success. I believe we can learn from these character traits and seek to emulate them as we raise our children. The following descriptions were mentioned multiple times:

- Exceptional leader
- Hard-working (strong work ethic)
- Determined
- Active, involved (member of the school community)
- Serves others
- Dedicated

In addition, these are also mentioned:

- Bright
- Curious
- Responsible
- Adapting
- Successful
- Persevering
- Goal oriented
- Person of character
- Honest and genuine
- Approachable
- Strong
- Confident
- Committed
- Ambitious
- Insatiable appetite for knowledge
- Self-aware
- Critical thinker
- Dependable
- Creative
- Outstanding
- Enduring

All of these are laudable characteristics and qualities to which we and our children can aspire.

David S. Glaser

CEO
dglaser@choicecorp.org
314.721.8422,
ext. 3013

VICC Staff *Ready to Assist Transferring Families*

recruitment



Lori Merlo,
314.721.8422, ext. 3012
lmerlo@choicecorp.org

Recruitment Staff

The Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation (VICC) staff is available Monday through Friday, 7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. to assist families with the magnet school application process and to answer general questions about the St. Louis Magnet Schools. Additionally, the recruitment staff can submit parents' requests for magnet school transportation arrangements.

The recruitment staff can often provide answers to specific questions parents may have or help put parents in touch with the individuals who can best answer their questions.

Counseling Staff

The VICC staff also includes five counselors who can assist families with issues related to their school transfers.

Counselors generally are assigned according to the first letter of the student's last name. They can be reached by calling 314.721.8422, and dialing their extension number below, or via email.

counseling



A-C Vickie Williams
ext. 3011
vwilliams@choicecorp.org



D-H Laverne Mitchom
ext. 3020
lmitchom@choicecorp.org



I-M Jennifer Christy
ext. 3021
jchristy@choicecorp.org



O-R Mildred Scott
ext. 3027
mscott@choicecorp.org



S-Z Mary Schafer Meehan
ext. 3016
mmeehan@choicecorp.org

School Starts August 17, 2016 for St. Louis Magnet Schools

EMERGENCY Communication System

To improve communication with parents regarding transportation and their child's participation in the St. Louis Student Transfer Program, the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation uses a telephone broadcast system, similar to ones used in many participating school districts.

This system, provided by School Messenger, allows VICC to quickly send all households and parents a pre-recorded message by phone within minutes of a transportation emergency or unplanned event that could significantly delay a child's pick-up or drop-off time. These emergencies include traffic jams, bus breakdowns, inclement weather, accidents, etc. The service may also be used from time-to-time to communicate general program announcements or reminders.

This system will simultaneously call a home and one additional cell phone or alternate number for each student's family who needs to be contacted and will deliver a message from Tami Webb, transportation operations manager, or another official with the transfer program. Calls will be delivered to both live (in person) responders and answering machines. Calls not answered and busy signals will be automatically retried by the system two additional times in 15 minute intervals after the initial call.

Your child's school will also continue to separately announce school closings due to inclement weather, via the media or their own phone system. However, in the event that the St. Louis Magnet Schools are open, but road conditions are such that VICC's transportation department feels it is not safe to transport students to school, VICC would use this separate system to notify families attending the affected schools in addition to making the standard media announcements.

For this system to best operate, it is imperative that you keep your school and VICC aware of any future changes in your home and/or cell or alternate/emergency phone numbers.

Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation (VICC) complies fully with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). FERPA is a law that affords parents and students 18 years of age and older with certain rights with respect to the student's educational records.

A copy of VICC's FERPA statement is included in the VICC student handbook, which can be requested by calling 314.721.8422, ext. 3012. The handbook is also available on the VICC website at www.choicecorp.org. Click on the link for "County Residents Currently Enrolled in City Magnet Schools," and then click on "Magnet School Handbook."

The full policy will be published in the next issue of the *Parent Link*.

TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION

Transportation to and from school is provided by the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation. The phone number for the transportation staff is 314.721.8657.

Transportation cards with the pick-up location and time will be mailed to all magnet school students by August 3. If you do not receive your card by August 10, contact Lori Merlo at 314.721.8422, ext. 3012.

After the school year begins, new cards will be mailed only if it is necessary to make a change to the bus/cab route. Such changes can occur whenever a student is added to or dropped from a route. Please review each new card carefully, including the effective date, stop location, times and transporter. Destroy all old cards.

Any day-to-day transportation problems or concerns you may have should be addressed by first calling the bus (or cab) contractor. These include normal operating issues, such as the following:

- Looking for lost items left on the bus/cab
 - Checking on activity bus location
 - Questions or cancellations when VICC Transportation office is closed.
 - Refer to your child's bus card for the appropriate bus/cab company.
- If the contractor is unable to resolve a concern or if you have one of the following issues, please call the VICC transportation staff at 314.721.8657:
- Overall routing issues or concerns
 - Pick-up or drop-off location concerns
 - Concerns with driver or contractor
 - Requesting cab or other alternative transportation service in the event your regular bus does not show.

Student Responsibilities

On school days, **students must arrive at their designated pick-up location 5 minutes before the scheduled pick-up time, and remain at least 15 minutes after the pick-up time**, before calling the transportation staff at 314.721.8657 for advice. If your child is not at the bus stop a full 10 minutes before the scheduled arrival time and does not wait the full 15 minutes after the scheduled time and he or she misses the bus, it will be the parents' responsibility to get the child to school for that day. The transportation office does not send alternative transportation in such instances.

For the safety of all children, students must obey general safety rules as well as those established by the St. Louis Public Schools which publishes a handbook outlining driver, student and parental responsibilities and listing penalties for violations which can include a student being removed from riding the bus either on a temporary or permanent basis. If a bus suspension occurs, it becomes the parents' responsibility to transport the child to and from school (including activities) for the duration of the suspension.

Parent Responsibilities

Transportation may run late and/or routes may not be firmly in place during the first few weeks of school. Please make sure your child knows exactly what to do if his or her bus does not arrive. This includes knowing where to go and whom to call. Also make sure your child knows what is expected when he or she is dropped off at the end of the school day. If you normally meet your child at the bus stop, be sure your child understands what to do if you are not there.

It is important for parents to keep the school as well as the VICC office informed of any changes in the home phone num-

ber or the cell or alternate/emergency phone number for your child. If either number changes, please contact Lori Merlo at 314.721.8422, ext. 3012 to request that the information be forwarded to the transportation office.

If You Move

If you move during the summer, call Lori Merlo at 314.721.8422, ext. 3012. Do not call transportation. Please remember, it takes up to 10 working days to make a transportation change. If you are going to move during the academic year, be sure to notify your child's building principal and also notify the VICC office at least two weeks before you move.

General Safety Rules

- Obey the driver promptly.
- Smoking, eating or drinking are not permitted.
- Remain seated until the bus arrives at your stop.
- Refrain from using loud or obscene language.
- Do not damage the bus/cab in any way.
- Do not throw objects on the bus/cab or out of the windows.
- Do not extend head, arms, legs or hands out of the windows.
- Do not tamper with the emergency door except in the case of a real emergency and only under the instruction of the driver.
- Fighting, scuffling or creating loud disturbances are not permitted.
- Avoid the Danger Zones next to the bus where the driver can't see you. This distance is approximately 10 feet around all sides.
- If you must cross the street after you get off the bus, wait for the driver to signal you and then cross in front of the bus.
- Don't try to pick up something dropped near the bus because the driver might not see you.
- Remember that other motorists don't always stop for a stopped school bus. Use extreme caution when getting on or off the bus.
- Never run back to the bus, even if you dropped or forgot something.

Student Safety

Help us protect your children as they travel to and from school. Certain types of children's clothing can create a hazard as your child exits the bus. Especially dangerous are jacket and sweatshirt drawstrings, long backpack straps, long scarfs and any other loose clothing. Such clothing could become caught in the bus handrail, door or other bus equipment as the child exits the bus. Please take time to check your children's clothing. Also talk with your child about the behavior and safety rules.

Trespass Policy

To bolster the safety of students riding buses to school the VICC board adopted the following trespassing policy:

"Trespass occurs when anyone boards a school bus without prior approval from VICC. Any VICC-designated person (including students), contractor or school staff whose job responsibilities require him/her to be on a school bus shall be authorized and not be considered trespassing. Only with prior approval from VICC or a contractor may any parent, guardian or member of the general public be allowed on a bus at any time."

Be sure to review the transportation sections in the Magnet School Handbook with your child before the start of school.

If you need a handbook, please call 314.721.8422, ext. 3012, or visit our website: www.choicecorp.org