



2019 Valley of Flowers Queen and Court: (left to right) Queen: Grace Gettemeier, Incarnate Word Academy (School), Handyman True Value (sponsor); 1st Runner up: Alayna Snelling, Rosati Kain (School), Commercial Bank (sponsor); Special Maids: Alise Sextro, Rosati Kain (School), Biondo Sewer District (sponsor) Alaina Cribbett, Marquette Catholic High School (School), Sacred Heart Catholic Church (sponsor) Hannah Crowder, Hazelwood West High School (School), Greater North County Chamber of Commerce (sponsor) Last year's queen, Yen Nguyen, crowned the new queen at the ceremony after the Valley of Flowers Parade which had as its theme: The Florissant Valley Fire Protection District's 100th anniversary. The queen and her court were honored at the annual Valley of Flowers dinner held Monday night at Detrich Hall at Christian Hospital Northeast. (More Valley of Flowers photos on pages 3,6,7.)
Nichole Richardson photo

2019 Valley of Flowers Parade Winners

Pretty Baby Contest:

Personality: Zachary
 Popularity: Mitchell

Beat Theme Unit (James J Eagan Award)

1st: Queen Candidate 3 Lexy Kostecki (VFW Post 4105)
 2nd: Queen Candidate 18 Sarah Schenk (State Farm: Steve Wood

Best Decoated Car

1st: Florissant Presbyterian Church
 2nd: Queen Candidate 5 Raigan Reynolds (NCCU)

Best Organization

1st: Queen Candidate 16 Hannah Crowder
 (Greater NorthCounty Chamber of Commerce)

Best Commercial Unit

1st: Queen Candidate 6 Grace Gettemeier
 2nd: Dairy Queen

Best Antique Car

1st: Olson Family
 2nd: Queen Candidate Chloe Hoth



The Independent News

HW West Senior Offered Scholarships to 22 Colleges

Decisions, decisions. Hazelwood West High School senior Gracemary Nganga is like many of her peers this time of year, as she weighs her options and chooses where to attend college.

What sets Nganga apart, though, is the fact her decision might be a little tougher.

How could it not be when you have 22 schools from which to choose?



Throughout the **Gracemary Nganga** course of her senior year, Nganga has received acceptance letters from almost two dozen different schools.

“I just really wanted options when it came to school and to make sure I could compare things like aid, support, resources, and I applied to a variety of different schools,” she said.

The names of the schools are as impressive as the number itself, including: Stanford, Yale, Washington University, Notre Dame, Emory, Oxford College of Emory, USC, Duke, Spelman College, Xavier in Louisiana, Franklin and Marshall, Pomona, Claremont McKenna, Hamilton, Swarthmore, Bowdoin, Grinnell, Saint Louis University, UMKC, Mizzou, DePaul, and UMSL.

Keep in mind that list doesn't include the schools for which Nganga was put on the wait list, among those were Dartmouth and Vanderbilt.

Nganga admits she has narrowed her list down to five schools, and she'll visit some of her top choices in April before making a final decision May 1.

“Obviously the academics at all of these schools are amazing,” she said. “I'd be surrounded by brilliant students and professors who have done so much in their fields, so now it's about finding the community and finding where I belong.”

It seems Nganga would be a natural fit at any of the 22 schools, having excelled throughout her academic career in the Hazelwood School District since emigrating from Kenya with her family before the second grade.

She is the true definition of a student leader, having started the African American Cultural Association at West High School, along with two separate student clubs focused on social justice and awareness.

A tough decision, yes, but one that Nganga has worked hard to earn, and one she hopes will motivate other students at West High School.

“It was a lot to take in because it's very surreal,” she said. “It's something you dream about and just having that goal of being accepted into top universities, and for me to actually get there and be accepted and have them want me there, it's a dream come true.”

The Independent News



The Hazelwood West Marching Band has been part of the Valley of Flowers Parade for several years and also one of the largest units. **Bob Lindsey photo**



North County high school student receives millions in scholarship offers



NORTH ST. LOUIS COUNTY (KMOV.com) – For any high school student, a college scholarship can make all the difference in the world.

Every bit helps, but one Hazelwood Central student is getting more than a little. Dakota Randle has received a total of \$4.8 million in scholarship offers.

She applied to 79 schools and each school offered her a scholarship. She said she plans to major in nuclear mechanical engineering, so she can work on environmental projects.

"All this news coverage and new science about climate change made me want to help the earth, so I would use my degree in nuclear engineering to create alternative energy," said Randle.

https://www.kmov.com/news/north-county-high-school-student-receives-millions-in-scholarship-offers/article_e59ed708-71d5-11e9-9fec-db25cdac8cda.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=user-share

May 8, 2019



The inspiration behind learning: Doolittle sees education as a lifelong opportunity

Masters student and graduate school commencement speaker Lindsay

Doolittle. As students are pulling all-nighters in preparation for finals week, senior graduate student Lindsay Doolittle, of Granite City, Illinois, is preparing for something more. Doolittle was chosen to give the commencement speech for the Graduate School at 6:30 p.m. on May 10 in the Vadalabene Center. Doolittle is receiving a Master of Arts in English with a specialization in teaching of writing. **She also currently teaches high school English in the Hazelwood school district.** Doolittle said that although she has considered getting her PhD one day, right now she is happy where she is at. For Doolittle, being chosen as a speaker was very important to her. "It made me feel like my experience was very valued and that they felt that my message was something important—that it was something that all the students and the attendees of the ceremony would benefit from," Doolittle said. Doolittle's speech centers on the inspiration behind learning and her experiences with continuing her education. "I'm focusing more on education being a lifelong thing and that it's not something you just stop once you receive a degree," Doolittle said. Doolittle's topic of inspiration was motivated by her children. Doolittle has four young children, ages 4-13. "They've been my inspiration to start school, to begin with in my undergraduate studies, then to become a teacher and now to be in graduate school," Doolittle said. Director of Graduate Education Jill Smucker, was involved in the process of finding the commencement speaker. Emails were sent out to graduate students by the graduate school, asking for students interested in giving a speech at commencement to complete an application and send in a resume. According to Smucker, the applications were reviewed by herself and others in the school and they ultimately chose Doolittle to be the speaker. "We selected Lindsay because she really had an inspirational story in both pursuing her bachelor's degree and master's degree at SIUE — she was a single mother. You could tell she embodied the spirit of a lifelong learner through what she says and what she does. Ultimately, we felt like her message would resonate with all of her peers, regardless of their background," Smucker said. Jill Anderson, Associate Professor and Program Director of Secondary English Education, was one of Doolittle's professors during her undergraduate studies. During the time that Anderson had Doolittle got to learn more about Doolittle and the person she is. "She's incredibly thoughtful and collaborative. She cares a lot about including students in the decision-making process," Anderson said. According to Anderson, Doolittle student taught at Alton Middle School, where she brought technology to the classroom and even developed a unit that included technology to help the school build their curriculum. Anderson, who has kept in touch with Doolittle even after her undergraduate years, is proud to see Doolittle giving the commencement speech. "She represents the best kind of student," Anderson said. "She's one of those flexible, smart speakers and thinkers who can work on her feet—which is a great characteristic of a high school English teacher."

HSD Communications note: Lindsay Doolittle is a teacher at WHS.



'We made a huge mistake' | Police admit they forgot to investigate teacher for 3 years after he was accused of molesting student

A Teacher with HIV was accused of taking a student out of class and molesting him. He went on to get jobs at several other districts. But police never questioned him. Now they admit to the I-Team: "We made a huge mistake"

For years he helped teach children, perhaps even your child.

But police claim Deonte Taylor had another purpose for working in schools: sexual gratification.

Prosecutors say Taylor graduated from teaching to rape and eventually attempted murder.

For months the I-Team has been piecing together how the police, several school districts and the state all dropped the ball in this case and allowed an accused sexual predator to move from school to school without anyone sounding the alarm.

November 2015

Taylor's history in the St. Louis school system begins in 2015. He was hired as a teacher's aide at Lusher elementary school, in the Hazelwood School Sistrict. According to police reports, Taylor was accused of taking a 7-year-old boy out of music class and into his office to molest him. The child, according to reports, was then taken back to class. What nobody knew at the time was that Taylor was HIV positive. Almost immediately, the boy's mother notified police and the child was examined for sexual assault. A few days later, the Hazelwood School District fired Taylor. But Taylor wasn't fired over the suspected assault. According to Hazelwood, Taylor was fired for "a violation of school board policy". The district won't specify which policy.

"We cannot go into detail but Taylor was terminated on November 15, 2015, due to a violation of board policy that was discovered as a part of the district's investigation into the parent's allegations. After the allegation was reported, he never returned to the Hazelwood School District," Kimberly McKenzie, Director of Communications and Public Relations for the Hazelwood School District told the I-Team in a statement.

The I-Team also found the district didn't notify any parents about the abuse allegation in 2015. We confronted district leaders about what action they took after the allegation was reported.

I-Team: Don't you think parents in the district would have wanted to know what this teacher was accused of? "That becomes a legal matter and I will agree that some parents, after they hear things, they will have a desire to know more, curiosity. And it is very hard for parents to understand that we have to live by laws and rules," said Mark Behlmann, President of the board of education for the Hazelwood school district.

"I think it's absolutely insane that the school district decided not to alert families to what was going on. This is something that should've been spoken about," said Antoine White, a father to a child in Lusher Elementary. DNA evidence confirmed the child was assaulted, But no DNA sample was taken from Taylor, and he was not arrested. Surprisingly, the I-Team found he wasn't even questioned by Florissant police

<https://www.ksdk.com/article/news/investigations/we-made-a-huge-mistake-police-admit-they-forgot-to-investigate-teacher-for-3-years-after-he-was-accused-of-molesting-student/63-1cf180cf-d1ce-403f-95d3-494b1e1c6b8e>



'We made a huge mistake' | Police admit they forgot to investigate teacher for 3 years after he was accused of molesting student, cont.

I-Team: When this student says 'this teacher did this to me', why wasn't DNA taken from the teacher at that point? Police Chief Tim Lowery answers may make your jaw drop.

"For some reason, this case basically sat on somebody's desk and wasn't investigated properly," said Lowery. The Police Chief went on to explain the investigator assigned to the case was reassigned to another department shortly after the first police report was filed. Lowery said, because of that, the case fell by the wayside and wouldn't see the light of day for several years.

I-Team: So basically an accused sexual predator was left free on the streets because this office dropped the ball? "Well it wasn't my office who dropped the ball, it was my investigators who dropped the ball. Yes."

I-Team: You were in charge of those investigators?

"Yes that's correct."

I-Team: They're your employees, they represent this office?

"Uh huh. That's correct. We made a mistake. There's no doubt we made a mistake and made a huge mistake," said Lowery. Lowery went on to confirm a DNA report confirming unknown male DNA was found the little boy was sent to the Florissant Police Department in August of 2016. But even almost ten months after the alleged abuse, police didn't follow up on the new findings. After being fired from the Hazelwood district for "a violation of school board policy" Taylor applied in the Jennings school district to be a student teacher at Fairview Primary School.

He got the job. The Hazelwood school district said they complied with all state and federal reporting requirements. But that didn't include letting any potential employers looking for a reference know what Taylor was accused of.

I-Team: why didn't you tell his next employer? He went on to teach in multiple school districts have access to potentially hundreds of kids. Why not let his next employer know what he was accused of?

"It was an accusation. That's as far as it went," said Behlmann. According to the Hazelwood school district, they had reason to believe Taylor wasn't a threat to anyone. "Although the District reported the allegations to DFS as required, the District received a notification from social services that the report was unsubstantiated. No further information was provided by the police," McKenzie said in a statement. DFS declined our request for more information on their investigation. So Taylor was back in the classroom. First at Fairview Elementary in the Jennings school district, then eventually at Walnut Grove Elementary in the Ferguson-Florissant school district from 2017 to 2018. He had graduated from teacher's aide to teacher and he was put in charge of his own fifth-grade class.

November 2018

It was during his second year at Walnut Grove Elementary when prosecutors finally charged Taylor for sexually assaulting his former student back in 2015.

What changed to put Taylor back on the police's radar?

At the time, police claimed there was new information in the case.

"An officer leaving the department played no role in this case. The case is simply investigated by another investigator. The Florissant Police Department investigated this case in 2015 and the case remained open and ongoing. Due to new revelations with this case, investigators were able to make an arrest," said Steve Michael, Officer with the Florissant Police Department told us in a statement in November of 2018.

The I-Team found that was a lie. The real reason the case was re-opened was simple and heartbreaking. We confronted Lowery about his department's false statements.

I-Team: Were there new revelations in 2018 that led to the reopening of this case? That's what we were told. But was it just the victim reporting it again?

May 8, 2019



'We made a huge mistake' | Police admit they forgot to investigate teacher for 3 years after he was accused of molesting student, cont.

"Yes," said Lowery.

It's all there in the court documents. Taylor would still be in school to this day if it wasn't for that little boy.

Three years after he had the courage to come forward, the boy reported the abuse again during an outburst at school.

That's when police finally got a warrant for Taylor's DNA.

It matched the sample taken from the child in 2015

I-Team: So if the victim hadn't spoken about it in 2018, Deonte Taylor an accused sexual predator would still be in our school systems with access to other potential victims?

"It's possible," said Lowery.

It's a possibility that leaves many parents in fear. Soon after he was charged with felony sodomy, prosecutors would also learn Taylor is HIV positive.

"I think it's sad and any parents that have children who could've come in contact with this person should definitely speak up and get their child tested because it's absolutely ridiculous," said White.

It took three years but Taylor was taken out of the class and put in jail.

Taylor is currently awaiting trial on several felony charges, including sodomy and recklessly risking the infection of another person with HIV.

We're told his child victim did not contract the disease.

Unfortunately, prosecutors say Taylor wasn't done yet.

They say Taylor was planning to get rid of all of his problems, with the help of a jailhouse hitman.

Thursday night at 10, the I-Team sits down with that hitman to find out why he agreed to take the job.

A victim's advocate has set up a Gofundme account for the 10-year-old victim and his family, who have struggled financially since the abuse. [Click here for more information.](#)

The Hazelwood School District provided the following statement:

Statement from the Hazelwood School District regarding the matter with a former employee.

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*As soon as the allegations regarding Deonte Taylor were made in November 2015, the Hazelwood School District turned the matter over to the Missouri State Children's Division (DFS) and the local police.*

*As a precaution, the District also immediately placed Taylor on leave pending the outcome of the investigation.*

*While waiting on the findings from the authorities, the District terminated Taylor's employment for reasons unrelated to this case while he was on leave. Taylor never returned to the school after the allegations. Although the District reported the allegations to DFS as required, the District received a notification from social services that the report was unsubstantiated. No further information was provided by the police.*

*Recently, the student victim provided additional information and the matter was once again reported by the District to DFS*