Are you smarter than a Super Kid? You are not. Included in this year’s class of Louisville’s brightest students: filmmaker, NASCAR driver, cupcake baker, painter, airplane pilot, soldier, 10-year-old black belt, clarinetist, polyglot, fundraiser, author. One actually wrote a paper titled "On the Solution of a Limited Class of Transcendental Systems." No, we have no clue what that means. Oh, and a lesson we learned: Don’t challenge a Super Kid to a game of chess.

Interviews by Amy Talbott
Photos by Chris Witzke
Minh moved with his family to the U.S. from Vietnam when he was in seventh grade. He worked hard to learn English when he got here, and with assistance from a nonprofit called Educational Justice, which provides tutoring to students from lower-income families, he scored above a 30 on the ACT. He was a 2014 Governor’s Scholar and is taking AP Chemistry online at the Harvard University Extension School. He’s planning to study computer science in college, then go to medical school.

Do you remember how you felt when you first moved here?
"I remember it was the snowiest day of the year, and it doesn’t snow in my country, so it was a new experience for me, as with everything else. My parents didn’t speak any English at all and neither did I or my brother. Then when I got to classes there were translators for different languages, and I was the only person in my class that was Vietnamese and there was no Vietnamese translator, so throughout that semester I had to really work on my own to learn English and understand the lesson. I think that was one of the factors that helped me to be able to move on more quickly than the other students at the Newcomer Academy."

What motivates you?
"I come from a family and culture that values education. And my family and also my extended family, my uncles and aunts, are always encouraging me and my brother to do our best, because they always remind us that’s the reason why my parents are here. My parents both worked in offices back in Vietnam: My dad was an accountant, my mom was a nurse. When they moved here, their certificate and degree didn’t really translate, and so they had to land really hard, labor-intensive jobs. My family is a big motivation for me."

Aboubacar also got tutoring at Educational Justice, scored high on the ACT and was a 2014 Governor’s Scholar. He’s taking the online AP Chemistry class from the Harvard Extension School and plans to study bioengineering in college before applying to medical school.

Tell us what it was like for you when you first got to the United States.
"When people spoke, it was kind of just gibberish."

Do you remember your first day of school?
"Really disorienting. It was like I was back in elementary school. People were talking and it was a bit frustrating. I remember there was this guy who came up to me and said, ‘What’s up?’ and I did not know what he was saying. But there was a girl next to me who said, ‘Oh, it’s just a greeting.’ So I just waved my hand."

How’d you learn to speak English?
"I went to the library and picked up elementary books, and every time I came across a word I didn’t know, I marked it, and when I came home I looked up the word and translated it and that’s really how I picked up the language. I would say in maybe six months I could really understand what most people were saying."

What’s your biggest motivating factor to excel academically?
"The knowledge that my parents brought me here because of education. My mom and my dad always said, ‘If it weren’t for you children, we would have been fine in our country.’ My dad was actually a doctor and my mom was an accountant, and they were doing just great. It was just to give us more opportunities for our education that they sacrificed themselves. And for me, the firstborn child of my family, I really had to be the role model and help my siblings."