



# INTERACTIONS



A newsletter from the Academy of Communications and Technology  
Charter School for supporters of ACT!

Fall 2002

## History

The Academy of Communications and Technology Charter School was opened in 1997 by founders, Sarah Howard and Michelle Smith, and a team of committed teachers. The group sought to improve the educational opportunities afforded to low-income, inner-city students who are frequently written off as unteachable. Nearly all of our students live in and around West Garfield Park, a neighborhood chronically plagued with gangs, drugs, unemployment, violence and other symptoms of poverty. West Garfield Park was recently cited as “the most dangerous neighborhood in Chicago to be a kid” by the *Chicago Tribune*. Despite the difficulties confronting the neighborhood, ACT believes that all of the school’s stakeholders – teachers, parents, students, and community members – can become partners in building a safe haven for learning and growth.

## Mission

ACT’s mission is to provide a college-preparatory education to historically underserved urban youth, preparing them to take their place in society as competent, confident, creative, and compassionate citizens of the world.

## Vision

We envision a society in which all children, regardless of their neighborhood, race, parents’ income or educational level, are afforded equitable educational opportunities.

**A Day in the Life...** Highlights of an ACT student along with their challenges, dreams, obstacles and successes.

### Maurice’s Dream: Harvard, Computers and Baseball

Meet Maurice Jones and his mom, Paula. Maurice is a ninth grader at ACT Charter School. Last year, Maurice was promoted from 8<sup>th</sup> grade with a 3.3 GPA and extremely high scores for his written and oral Exhibition & Defense work. He passed all of his oral defenses on the first round, a rare feat at ACT where the promotion standards are extremely challenging. Maurice also plays football, basketball and softball for the ACT Phantoms.

Perhaps most amazing about Maurice is that he has

accomplished all of this while dealing with some tremendous challenges at home: an absentee dad and a mom battling addiction. InterACTions recently interviewed mother and son to discuss these challenges.

ACT: Paula, where did you grow up?

Paula: Well, I grew up on the South Side [of Chicago] and the thing I remember most is the violence...death, drive-by shootings...pretty much everyday. To deal with being afraid, my friends and I just tried to be “grown.” We didn’t value school very much ... nobody did. We couldn’t see what it would do for us. I dropped out



of high school in 9th grade. Drugs and alcohol were everywhere and we tried everything. There was nothing else to do. It was just expected. I’m not sure when, but at some point the drugs starting getting out of control. I’m really not sure how long I abused drugs. There’s a lot time that is just missing from my memory.

ACT: Where is Maurice’s dad?

Paula: In and out of jail. In and out  
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out of his drug habit. He's not around much.

ACT: How did you raise your children through all of this?

Paula: Raising Maurice and his brother, "Kool Aid," by myself has been my biggest challenge. I couldn't have done it without my mom. She basically raised Maurice while I was lost in my drug habit. She drove him to school everyday, checked his homework before she'd let him go outside. Since my mom struggled with alcohol and I struggled with drugs, we wanted something different for Maurice.

ACT: What was the turning point for you?

Paula: God showed me my funeral. I was pretty low at the time, and knew this was it. I had to turn it around or I wasn't going to live much longer. At this point I started going in and out of drug rehab.

ACT: Maurice, what can you

remember about your mom's struggle?

Maurice: I didn't really understand what was going on. I thought she was sick but I didn't know why. I love my grandma, but I wanted to be with my mom, too. When I was about nine, I asked her why she was always in the hospital. She explained her problem to me.

Paula: I was happy he asked...I wanted him to know the truth.

ACT: How is your recovery going?

Paula: I've had three or four relapses, but I've been clean for six years now, and Maurice and I have been on our own for three years. We still live in the same building as my mom, but we have our own place. I have a steady job as a cashier in a restaurant.

ACT: Maurice, what have you learned from your parents' experiences?

Maurice: I know I want to stay away from drugs and the streets. I love my mom and grandma,

they are the most important people in my life. But I don't get to see my dad that often. If I have a son or daughter someday, I want to do a better job than my dad.

ACT: What are your goals?

Maurice: I want to go to Harvard for college, and I'd like to be a baseball player. I'm interested in being a computer technician, too.

ACT: Paula, what do you want for your son?

Paula: I just want to see him stay away from drugs and finish high school. I regret not finishing high school. But that's about to change. I went back [to school] so someday Maurice and I will both have a high school diploma. I'm in a mail correspondence program and I should be done in June, class of 2003!

InterACTions would like to thank Maurice and Paula Jones for sharing their story .

<b>Educational Revenue Disparities</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Gap per student</b>	<b>Gap calculated for a classroom of 25 students</b>
One of the challenges in providing a quality education for students in inner-city Chicago is disparity in school financing. Illinois is second only to New York when it comes to states with the largest per-student gap between funds available in the wealthiest and poorest districts. Obviously, Chicago is one of Illinois' most poorly funded districts.	New York	\$2,152	\$53,800
	Illinois	\$2,060	\$51,500
	Montana	\$1,535	\$38,375
	Pennsylvania	\$1,248	\$31,200
	Michigan	\$1,103	\$27,575
	<b>United States</b>	<b>\$ 966</b>	<b>\$24,150</b>

*Source: The Education Trust*



**Shout Outs!!!...** A big ACT thank you to the many individuals, corporations and foundations who contribute to ACT Charter School!

### **George Ruhana and Kim Job Kick Off Annual Fund!**

Each year donations received as a result of our holiday card, annual events and newsletters go toward our general operating budget. These donations help us pay the bills so we can continue to provide inner city students with a college-prep education.

This year, before we even opened our doors for the fall trimester, Mr. Ruhana and his wife, Ms. Job, sent us a generous donation to kick off our school year. Thank you for a "job" well done! (Get it?)



### **The "T" is for *Technology***

ACT incorporates technology into all areas of its core curriculum and requires computer classes for all students. Two companies stepped up to the plate over the last year to help us reach our goal of five computers in every classroom. Matt Figurski, founder and CEO of **CyLogix** in New York, donated ten Dell computers last spring. The computers are up and running and have been a huge hit in classrooms this fall.

**PEAK6**, an equity options trading firm in Chicago,

delivered three Compaq computers to ACT this fall. Not only have they come through with tech support via computers, but **PEAK6** employees adopted ACT three years ago when they started attending our annual event, Spring Fling, en masse. Special thanks to Scott Anderson, Matt Dillon, Susan Hendrick, Matthew Hulsizer, Michael Klearman, Jenny Makowiec, Daniel Perper, Jud Pyle, George Ruhana, Danny Rosenthal, Michael Salem and Jim Stonebridge!



### **The "C" isn't for *Cookie*, it's for *Communication Arts* (Although we like cookies, too!)**

In addition to technology, ACT integrates the communications arts into the core curriculum and offers several stand-alone communication arts classes. One of our arts majors is drama. Thanks to the Kurtzman family - Allan, Sandy and Matthew - the drama department now has a black box theater! The Kurtzman's spent two days this summer painting the walls and ceilings of the theater black. The students now refer to this space as the "cool room" and the theater provides the perfect ambience for ACT's newest tradition, Open Mic Night. The Apollo Theater's got nothin' on us!



### **Connecting the Classroom to the Real World**

ACT believes that education should extend beyond the walls of the classroom. Our Field Experience and Internship program help students understand the connection between what they are learning today and their options for the future. We would like to thank the following sponsor organizations for playing an important role in educating our students.

Advocate Health Center • Allison Unites Foundation • American Family Insurance • Anti-Cruelty Society • The Austin Voice Newspaper • Bethany Hospital • Bethel New Life • Bold Chicago • Community TV Network • Corbin Colonial Chapels • Devry Institute of Technology • Faith It Is Nail Salon • Futterman & Howard, Chtd. • Gallery 312 • Garfield Park Conservatory • I Have a Dream Foundation • Jones, Day, Reavis & Pogue • Lifelink • Literacy Chicago • Malcolm X College • New Beginning Day Care • Piccolo Specialty School • Rush Presbyterian Hospital • Sae Young Management • State of Illinois Police Department • Trinidad Mechanic Shop • Video Data Bank • West Suburban Hospital



## SAVE THE DATE !!!

Mark your calendars for the following ACT annual events:

**Family Night**    **March 27, 2003**  
**Spring Fling**    **May 15, 2003**

The ACT End-Zone, our after-school enrichment program, will present their work on the following dates:

**Fall Showcase**    **Nov. 26, 2002**  
**Spring Showcase**    **June 19, 2003**

For more info contact Jacob Campbell at x290.

The 2nd Friday of every month is *Open Mic Night* at ACT. See students and teachers showcase their talents. For more info contact Toni Billingsley at x125.

## Parents Are Supporters, Too!

Teresa Harris, our Parent Advocate, has challenged parents to meet our goal of 100% payment of student fees this school year. ACT would like to *shout out* the following parents for paying both the activity fee (\$50) and lab fee (\$10).

Monique Anderson • Charles W. Avery • Anelisa Bailey • Carolyn Banks • Teresa Barlow • Andrew Bell • Edwina Betts • Shirley & Mark Bills • Monica Billingsley • Bonnie Blakes • Charese Bonner • Lenora Brown • Robin Campbell • Percinda Carodine • Janice Carr • Carmen & Rafael Carrion • Yvonne Carroll • Holly Christian • Annie & David Coleman • LaDawn Coleman •

Bonnie Deamon • Vanessa Doise • Tracy Duke • Georgia Dunbar • Shalonda Eaton • Louellen Echols • Sherri Edmonds • Rochelle Ford • Hazel Foster • Hattie Franklin • Lynda Frazier • Lakisha Gardner • Minnie & James Gibson • Keyina Gill • Ramona Graham • Ms. Green • Sandra Griggs • Alonda Handley • Racheal Harrington • Betty & Howard Henderson • Annie Hoskins • Willie Huffman • Enetha Hyman • Annette Jackson • Patricia Jackson • Judy Jeffries • Bernice Jones • Mossie A. Jones • Ollestine King • Bertha Kirkland • Barbara Lee • William Linear • Octavia Logan • Dale Lones, Sr. • Gwendolyn Lones • Arletta Luckey • Lisha Mathews-Fambro • Andrea Moore • Tolise Moore • Sandra Minter • Ida Nichols • Annette Nunn • Schawanda Parker • Abbie & Jimmy Pounds • Mae Raggs • Sylvester Raggs • Ola Lenior Rogers • Delores & George Sheppard • Freddie Mae Simmons • Terry Sims • Micki Sission • Theresa Smart • Deola C. Smith • Rosalind Smith • Patricia Steen • Patricia Streeter • Delores Sturdivant • Temetary Taylor • Petrina Thomas • Angela Thompson • Vivian Tolbert • Barbara & William Townsend, Sr. • Lazarick Walker • Benita Watson • Cresandra Williams • Neema Woodward • Martin Vickie • Tommie Vinsen • Doris Young

If you need to pay your student fees, please contact Angela Wilson, School Secretary, in the main office at x221.

## ACT Teachers and Staff

Sarah Howard  
Executive Director, Principal

Thomas Ivey  
Director of School Operations

James Abbatiello • Tameka Berry • Toni Billingsley • Emmy Bright • Jacob Campbell • Nicole Cannon • Laurie Chapkin • Jeff Cross • Karen Croteau • Latesha Dickerson • Joanne Duong • Dennis Federico • Tony Gianneschi • Betty Hawkins • Teresa Harris • Kathleen Hayes • Michael Henderson • Niketa Johnson • Rhonda Kelley • Will King • Afina Lockhart • Rena Marzen • Alex Mendez • Mark Patton • Heather Roschke • Dwayne Sanders • Kate Schmotzer • Robert Scott • Kris Sieloff • Doug van Dyke • Melanie Vaughn • Rebecca Watson • Bob Weaver • Derrick Whitaker • Angela Wilson • Corrie Witt • John Zack • Mike Zenke

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For questions or comments regarding this newsletter or to schedule a school tour, please contact Karen Croteau, Director of Development at (773) 626-4200 x240.

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