

Freda McArthur

Executive Director

Freda McArthur is the co-founder of the Alternative Academic Achievement Academy. While serving on the Board of Education at School District 160 in Country Club Hills, Illinois, she faced an expulsion hearing for a ten-year-old third-grade female with no IEP. (Individual Education Plan). There were limitations on where this student could be placed, which fostered a significant concern within her over the lack of services available to students who did not fit the traditional environment. The process for state approval began in the fall of 1999. The plan was constructed and received state approval in less than six months. The original approval was for grades 3 through 8, considered at-risk students. They quickly recognized the need to serve students in special education and reapplied to the Illinois State Board of Education to receive students with special education labeling. The State Board of Education approves AAA Academy to receive pre-K through 8th-grade students in our Special Education and Alternative programs.

As a board member of School District 160, where she served for over eighteen years, she was educated and trained in school finance, school law, contract negotiations, school budgets, and staff development. She remained a dedicated board member until the Alternative Academic Achievement Academy was born.

In March 2000, the Alternative Academic Achievement Academy was born without grants, loans, or official financial support. The theme "All Children Are Worth Saving" became the motto and the mission. The school had to have a physical location as part of the approval process. AAA Academy was initially located in three little row houses in Country Club Hills. The program out-grew the Country Club Hills location within three years and moved to St. Anne's school in Hazel Crest, Illinois. The enrollment was multiplied within three years, and within three years, they moved to St. Stanislaus School in Posen, Illinois. As a visionary, Freda knew that AAA Academy needed to own its property. While looking for a permanent location, Freda knew of a vacant school owned by West Harvey Dixmoor 147 in Blue Island, Illinois. The school in Blue Island was put out for bids because it was public property. AAA Academy won the bid, purchased the property without any loans or mortgages, and has a clear and accessible title to the school located at 13801 S. Chatham in Blue Island.

The first school districts that AAA Academy served were West Harvey-Dixmoor 147, Posen Robbins 143.5, Prairie Hills 144, and Calumet City 155. The Academy currently services students in over thirty-five south suburban school districts and the city of Chicago 299.

The Alternative Academic Achievement Academy has a five-to-one student ratio. Students receive door-to-door transportation via school buses and vans that the Academy owns. A strong disciplinarian meets students at the Academy with compassion for making a difference in the lives of the children served by the Academy.

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As Executive Director of the Alternative Academic Achievement Academy, much of her time is spent with parents, probation officers, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Juvenile court systems, Special Education Directors, local police departments, and elected officials.

Freda was elected to the city council of Country Club Hill as the Third Ward Alderwoman in 1994. She quickly realized that her calling was to work with children. As an Alderwoman, she served on the Finance, Planning and Zoning, Public Works, and Education Committees.

Freda has been an active Illinois Association of Private Education Schools member since 2002. As a member, she works with legislators to develop Policies and Procedures affecting Illinois Private Schools. She also works closely on changes in legislation for state funding and school law.

Freda is a Crisis Prevention Instructor who specializes in verbal de-escalation.

Freda currently serves as President of the Board of Directors for WEW, Women Empowering Women, based in Richmond, Virginia. She is the current President of the School District 160 Education Foundation. As President, she has been instrumental in working with women who have been incarcerated, unwed mothers and individuals in homeless shelters and providing educational opportunities to high school students and young women in college.

In 2024 Executive Director Freda McArthur was honored by the South Suburban News as one of the South Suburban 2024 Black Women of Excellence. In the same year she was one of five recipients of the Women of Excellence award presented by the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County, Iris Martinez.

Freda is a Broadcasting major from DePaul University in Chicago. She received her FCC license from the State Technical Institute.

Freda is a Bethlehem Temple Baptist Church member in Harvey, Illinois, under the Pastorate of Rev. Jeffrey L. Smith.

Freda has been married to Douglas McArthur for forty-Eight years and is the mother of three children, Jason, Charles, and Apryll; she is the grandmother of Alexander and Liam.