

Dr. Aurelia L. Curtis is the Founder & Executive Director of the Weeks Educational and Social Advocacy Project, Inc. (WESAP), a nonprofit organization based on Staten Island and in Liberia. WESAP's mission is to increase access to better education options, expand social development and improve healthcare in needy communities. It has connected amputee children in Liberia with resources in the US, offering them prosthetic limbs and preventive healthcare. When the children return to Liberia, WESAP ensures that they are enrolled in school, providing all tuition fees, books and uniforms. A local social worker is a liaison between WESAP, students and families, supporting youth development and other family needs. WESAP has launched a campaign to put water wells near schools in Liberia that have no freshwater supply and is in partnership with two US-based nonprofits to establish an all-girl boarding school in Liberia.

WESAP's advocacy work has helped families to heal during crises and secure much needed assistance. Young Liberian children who may never have had a chance to participate in the arts are now learning music and performing with the Staten Island Steel Pan Orchestra, a WESAP arts initiative. They are learning the connections between their culture and others that are sometimes perceived to be so different. While not limited to Liberians, WESAP's afterschool program services a majority of children from Liberian families. As such, Dr. Curtis continues to scaffold education for diverse learners and support Liberian families in the Diaspora.

Dr. Curtis retired in June 2015 after 31 years of service to the New York City Public Schools. Her appointment in July 2003 was historic on two levels. She was the first African-American to be named as principal of a high school on Staten Island and the first female principal of Curtis High School in its more than one hundred year history. As principal of Curtis High School, she served a diverse immigrant community that included a large number of Liberian families in the Diaspora. Her understanding of the history and culture was instrumental in helping to structure support and academic interventions needed to bridge the gap for many, some of whom were students with interrupted formal education (SIFE). She encapsulated her message to students and staff in three foundations that all members of the school community embraced and strove to fulfill ~ ATTITUDE, ATTENDANCE, and ACHIEVEMENT.

During her tenure, the College Board named Curtis High School, one of three national recipients of its coveted *Inspiration Award* in 2005 for the school's success in challenging and supporting students to pursue college education. In 2010, the Washington Post named the school as one of *America's Best High Schools*. The New York Daily News featured the school as one of *New York City's Best High Schools* in 2012. In 2014 and 2015, Newsweek listed the school among the *Most Challenging Schools in America*. In 2007, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) awarded its first Teacher Union Day Partnership award to Curtis High School in recognition of the successful partnership forged between all educators in the school. In 2013, Education Update named Dr. Curtis an Outstanding Educator of the Year.

She taught Mathematics and Computer Science at Curtis for fourteen (14) years before she became an administrator. Aurelia is an Adjunct Associate Professor at Brooklyn College and has been an adjunct at New Jersey City University, Polytechnic University, the College of Staten Island and Mercy College. Dr. Curtis has served as the North American representative on the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) Planning Committee which met annually in Cardiff, Wales. Under her leadership, Curtis High School's IBDP is featured in Hamish McCrae's book, "What Works: Success in Stressful Times", the secrets of the world's best organizations and

communities. While principals are not required to teach a class, Aurelia always taught at least one course each term, which kept her in close contact with the reality of the daily challenges that teachers face in the classroom and reminded her of the reasons why she chose education in the first place. She firmly believes that one hundred years from now, it definitely will not matter what car she drove or how much money she earned. What will matter is did she “make a difference in the life of a child?”

Dr. Curtis is involved in a number of community-based organizations. She was the Program Chairperson for the 169th celebration of Liberia’s independence on Staten Island, the largest cohesive gathering of Liberians on the Island in recent history. She continues to serve as an advisor to many Liberian organizations and is actively involved in the Liberian Community. She is a founding member of the University of Liberia Alumni Chorus (ULAC) and Program Chair for its 9th Benefit Concert scheduled to be held on Staten Island in November 2017. She has served as the orator for the annual meeting of the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas.

She is a life member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and has served on the Executive Board of the Staten Island branch in addition to serving as the branch Treasurer. She is on the Board of Trustees of New Venture Charter School. She serves on the Executive Board of Project Hospitality, a Staten Island-based not-for-profit which helps to meet the needs of the homeless. She was selected to represent the United States as a Japan Fulbright Memorial Scholar.

She is the recipient of many awards and recognitions for her service to the community and contributions to education. Some of these are: The Victor E. Ward Foundation (a Liberian organization) Lifetime Achievement in Education; the Staten Island Liberian Community Association Service award; Faith Temple (Liberian church) Service Award; and First United Christian Church (Liberian church) Service Award.

She received her undergraduate education from the University of Liberia, majoring in Chemistry. She earned graduate degrees from Columbia University Teacher’s College (Masters) and St. John’s University (Doctorate).

Service to God is a central part of Aurelia’s life. She is a member of Christ United Methodist Church on Staten Island where she is a certified lay speaker and Lay Leader of the Church. In the midst of many busy days, she is reminded of the graciousness of God and the constant need to place Him first in her life.

Aurelia is married to Alfred B. Curtis, Jr. They have three wonderful children that inspire her everyday to be the best Mom she could ever be! Her son, Al III, is a Major in the United States Air Force currently assigned in Ramstein, Germany. Her daughter, Tiffany, is a National Training Specialist with the Posse Foundation, a not-for-profit leadership development program; and Gillian, the youngest, is a digital associate at OMD, a global media conglomerate. Al, Tiffany and Gillian give her a new reason each day to want to be a good teacher, a caring mother and a trustworthy friend. Aurelia believes that if she *“can help somebody along the way, then [her] living will not be in vain.”*