

BALTIMORE SCHOOL
for the **ARTS**

For Immediate Release

September 28, 2015

Contact

Christina Camba

Profiles, Inc.

410-243-3790

christina@profiespr.com

**Donald Hicken, Baltimore School for the Arts Theater Department
Head, to Retire from School After 36 Years**

*Tony Award Finalist for Excellence in Theatre Education is example of an
educator dedicated to the belief "the arts change kids' lives"*

(Baltimore, Md.) -- Baltimore School for Arts (BSA) announced today that long-time head of the theater department, Donald Hicken, would be retiring at academic year-end.

Hicken has been at the school from before day one as a member of the planning team when the BSA was just an idea. Over the years, he has taught and influenced hundreds of students including Jada Pinkett Smith, Josh Charles, Shalita Grant, Tupac Shakur, Lance Coadie Williams and Tracie Thoms.

"Donald has life-changing impact on all of the students he teaches. They learn the power of sustained effort and the responsibility of empathy. Beyond that, he has shaped BSA to be the unique, powerful and nurturing place that it is today. His students and this school are both an awesome legacy of his humane wisdom," said Chris Ford, BSA's Director and Hicken's longtime colleague at BSA.

Earlier this year, Hicken was recognized as a finalist for the first-ever Tony Award for Excellence in Theatre Education, a special honor that recognizes K-12 theatre educators in the U.S. who have demonstrated monumental impact on the lives of students and who embody the highest standards of the profession. More than 4,000 educators across 47 states were nominated for the inaugural award and just three received particular distinction.

In her letter supporting Hicken's nomination, Tony-nominee and BSA alumna Shalita Grant said, "Sometimes I look at my life, and I think, 'wow, I've come so so far.' But I cry whenever I ask myself this question: Where would I be if Donald had said no? It breaks my heart when I think about how my life would have turned out. I'm certain I wouldn't have attended Juilliard. My life and the students who've graduated the theater program all have BSA and Donald to

thank. Donald has changed my life and singlehandedly put me on the path to be the woman I am today."

At BSA, Hicken's productions include: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Lysistrata*, *The Rimers of Eldridge*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Marat/Sade*, *Curse of the Starving Class*, *Yerma*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *The Lady From Maxim's*, his own adaptation of *The Wind in the Willows*, *A Chekov Sampler*, *Ionescorama* (an evening of one-act plays by Eugene Ionesco), the world premiere of *Chalk* by Al Letson (co-commissioned with the Baltimore Theatre Project) and *Our Town*. In 2009 he received the League Educator Apple Award from The Broadway League.

In 2006, Hicken founded an international exchange program, unique for a public city school. In its 10th year, the program brings acting students from England to BSA for a week in October where they begin work on a play with their American counterparts. BSA's senior acting ensemble then goes to the U.K. (currently the partnership is with Showdown Theatre Arts) in the spring when rehearsals are continued and a full production is staged. The BSA students, most of whom have never traveled abroad, also have the opportunity to visit London theatres and other sites.

The BSA community of alumni and friends will have the opportunity to honor and celebrate Hicken at gatherings in California and New York this coming winter, as well as at a BSA event in mid-June. The school is launching a national search for Hicken's replacement.

Baltimore School for the Arts is a nationally recognized public arts high school that provides its students with intensive pre-professional training in the arts in conjunction with a rigorous academic curriculum. BSA graduates go on to the most selective arts and university programs nationwide and achieve prominence in theater, film, music, dance and visual arts. Additionally, BSA's highly acclaimed TWIGS program offers free after-school arts instruction to 750 city elementary and middle school children from schools across Baltimore, as well as other outreach initiatives to thousands more. Founded in 1979, the school is an integral and vibrant part of Baltimore's educational and cultural communities.

Baltimore School for the Arts, where the arts change kids' lives.

###