



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
August 1, 2019

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## **The Belair-Edison School Replaces Brehms Lane and Afya Public Charter Schools**

*Leadership believes that the newly unified, dual-facility school will better serve neighborhood children in pre-k through eighth grades*

BALTIMORE – As of July 1, 2019, the merger of Brehms Lane and Afya Public Charter Schools is complete. The Belair-Edison School, operated by nonprofit Afya Baltimore, Inc. (ABI), will kick off its first year as a unified school on September 3.

Both Brehms Lane and Afya are located in the Belair-Edison neighborhood of Northeast Baltimore. Brehms Lane was one of Belair-Edison’s zoned elementary schools, which Afya Baltimore began operating as a public charter school in 2016. Afya, a public charter middle school that opened in 2008, was the operator’s first school.

The leadership of Afya Baltimore sought to merge the schools to better serve students, ensuring a smooth transition between elementary and middle school, and to shore up the sustainability of both programs. The schools’ merger was approved by the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners in August 2018. Following approval, the operator’s staff and school leadership worked to create a transition plan and engage the community around the unified school, which included a name change.

“We believe this merger is good for students, families and the community. The Belair-Edison School will serve as an anchor in the community,” said Will McKenna, executive director and founder of Afya Baltimore. “Families can now rely on one continuous, high-quality educational experience for their children from pre-k through eighth grade. In addition, there are efficiencies in operating as one school that will allow us to invest more in our facilities and programming.”

The new name, The Belair-Edison School, was a natural fit for the merged school, which serves more than 1,000 students from the surrounding community. The School Board approved the name change in May 2019, and the merger was complete as of July 1. The school will operate as a zoned charter school, meaning that children in zone will have priority and any additional spaces will be filled through the charter school lottery process.

“I loved that Afya’s name had meaning – it’s Swahili for health, and health is at the heart of what they do. But, I also loved that they were willing to change the name to something that really reflects the community. That’s huge,” Will Smith, executive director of Belair-Edison Neighborhoods, Inc. (BENI), said. “At BENI, we work to support first time homeowners and small businesses in this neighborhood. And having strong schools is very important because that is at the heart of picking a place to live or do business. I know that Afya Baltimore will continue doing great things at The Belair-Edison School and that the school will continue being an asset in the neighborhood.”

The Belair-Edison School will continue to operate two campuses, with the elementary school remaining at 3536 Brehms Ln. and the middle school nearby at 2800 Brendan Ave. Both principals – Diya Slayton at the elementary level and Tiffany Halsey at the middle school – will also remain in place so that each campus has leadership on site.

When students return to the school on September 3, both campuses will be updated so that the signs and colors reflect the new name and new logo. Parents have also been purchasing new uniforms this summer. Social media accounts and the school's website will also be updated before the start of school. If parents have additional questions, they should contact Will McKenna.

"There will be a lot of visible changes for our new, unified school," McKenna said. "But our mission remains the same: the engaging and equitable education of the whole child: intellectually, socially/emotionally, and physically. This is The Afya Way."

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Founded in 2007, Afya Baltimore Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization started by five Baltimore City Public School System educators for the purpose of creating charter schools in Baltimore City. The word Afya is Swahili for health, and health is at the heart of what we do at Afya Baltimore and in our schools. Our schools include The Belair-Edison School, an elementary/middle school in the Belair-Edison neighborhood serving more than 1,000 students in grades pre-k through eight, and Tunbridge Public Charter School, an elementary/middle school in the Govans neighborhood, serving approximately 475 students in grades pre-k through eight.