THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

Instructional Visit Summary
Liguori Academy Fortis

Provider: Liguori, Inc.
Contract Term: FY 2018 - 2022

Site Visit Date: Wednesday, April 4, 2018- 9:00 a.m.
Program Capacity: 125

Site Visit Review Team:
Majeedah Scott, Director, Multiple Pathways to Graduation, Opportunity Network
Marcus De Vose, Asst. Director, Transition Services, Opportunity Network
Elvis Mucaj, Strategy Analyst II, Opportunity Network
Luis Rosario, Project U-Turn Fellow, Opportunity Network

Program Staff:
Michael Marrone, President, Liguori Academy, Inc.
William Corazo, Director of Student Services, Liguori Academy Fortis
Heather Belmonte, Director of Special Education, Liguori Academy Fortis
Michael Phipps, Postsecondary Counselor, Liguori Academy Fortis
Ramin Noroozi, Asst. Director of Student Services, Liguori Academy Fortis

Overview of Instructional Site Visits:
Instructional site visits consist of four main parts: **Academic Success Questions with Leadership**; **Academic Success Questions with Teachers**; **Academic Success Questions with Students**; and **Classroom Observations**. **Academic Success Questions with Leadership** includes standardized questions that focus on: data and academic outcomes; academic outcomes versus goals; and preparation for classroom observations. **Academic Success Questions with Teachers** includes standardized questions that focus on: the use of academic assessments; academic outcomes versus goals; and the school's overall academic performance. **Academic Success Questions with Students** includes standardized questions that focus on: student backgrounds and previous educational experiences; academic expectations set by Teachers; tests, grading procedures, and supports from Teachers; overall level of satisfaction with the program; and recommendations for improvement. **Classroom Observations** was guided by a standardized Classroom Observation Form that assessed elements of: the classroom environment; instruction; and assessments.

Comments/ Considerations:
Liguori Academy Fortis is an Accelerated program in its first year of operation. Liguori, Inc. was awarded a contract to operate an Accelerated program via the Request for Proposals 520 competitive bid process for Alternative Education Programs.

Academic Success Questions with Leadership

Academic Outcomes. Liguori Academy Fortis presented and discussed the program's key academic data, including baseline literacy and numeracy scores, retention rate, projected graduation data, percentage of students attending at least 85% of school days, and Special Education data. Liguori Academy Fortis aggregated and analyzed its own data as a demonstration of the program's ability to make data-informed decisions for positive student outcomes. The leadership of Liguori Academy Fortis explained some of the key drivers of their academic outcomes. The program recently hired a Director of Student Services to support students who are chronically absent and those who need extra social-emotional support in order to be successful academically. The program is still building upon the new role as they engage in strategic planning for next school year. Liguori Academy Fortis tracks student attendance on a daily basis and groups students into three-tiers based on their attendance. The program offers rewards for students with high attendance, and provides interventions for students with low attendance. The staff at Liguori Academy Fortis gets to know all of their students well and are often able to uncover root causes for poor student attendance. Depending on the root cause, program staff will work with the student to gain the necessary resources to help the student come to school everyday. Liguori Academy Fortis uses a blended learning model throughout the program. Students receive coursework via the Edgenuity computer-based platform and also through direct instruction. Students receive direct instruction from a teacher in all of their courses three times each week. Students work independently on their coursework in Edgenuity when they are not rostered for direct instruction. Teachers have office hours daily to support students who need extra help. Liguori Academy Fortis teachers monitor student progress in Edgenuity throughout each school day. The program's leadership recognized the importance of closely monitoring computer-based learning to ensure that students are progressing at an acceptable pace and are not stuck in a particular lesson because they need help. Teachers and students can communicate with each other via Edgenuity. Teachers will send students messages via the platform whenever they see students making little progress in their lessons. Liguori Academy Fortis leadership discussed their ongoing efforts to improve use of Edgenuity within their learning model. Program staff have advanced their practices with the platform this school year to pull various reports on student learning. Program leadership have already contracted with Edgenuity to provide hands-on technical assistance for next school year. These trainings will begin at the end of this school year and continue throughout the summer. The program aims to customize their courses in Edgenuity and to use all of the reporting functions that support their program-wide objectives. **Academic Outcomes versus Goals.** The program's Special Education teacher works with all staff and students who have Individual Education Programs (IEPs). Students with IEPs receive one-on-one support and support in small group settings. The Special Education teacher pushes into classrooms, and also works with students when they are not rostered for direct instruction. General education teachers and the Special Education teacher collaborate daily to ensure that students receive instruction that is aligned with their IEPs. In addition, the program's Special Education teacher provides professional development to general education teachers to bolster instruction for all students. Liguori Academy Fortis leadership noted the importance of utilizing strategies that differentiate instruction. To that end, the program has recently been engaging in professional development on Bloom's Taxonomy. Teachers are beginning to use this theory of learning to incorporate differentiation strategies and higher order thinking skills into their lesson plans. The program's principal reviews lesson plans on a weekly

basis and provides feedback and support to teachers as needed. The principal reviews lesson plans to ensure alignment between Edgenuity content and classroom instruction, and also to ensure that direct instruction reinforces Edgenuity lessons without duplication. **Classroom Observation Preparation.** In preparation for classroom observations, Liguori Academy Fortis leadership explained what we should expect to see. Some students should be in class engaged in direct instruction, and other students should be working independently on their Edgenuity courses. Lesson objectives and agenda should be posted in each classroom, and students should not be working on their laptops during direct instruction. Teachers should be using a variety of strategies, including small group work, student presentations, and independent assignments. Students who are not rostered for class during the observation should be working on their Edgenuity courses in a workspace of their choice within the program's common learning area.

Classroom Observations

Review team members observed an African American History class for the final seven minutes of the class period. A total of seven students were present in class during the observation. Most students were on-task and actively engaged with the lesson. There was no recent student work posted on the walls, but classroom procedures and some instructional resources were on display in the classroom. The class agenda and lesson objective were written on the whiteboard. The lesson objective did not relate to any content standards or specific skills that students would use or gain. The students were required to complete a warm-up activity and the teacher collected it before they were dismissed. The class was learning about African American soldiers in early American history. The mode of instruction observed was lecture, with brief questions and answers to finish the lecture. The teacher walked around the room while lecturing and encouraged students to discuss the topics, however, only one or two students joined the discussion. The teacher asked all students to answer an exit question in their Google Classroom by writing one to two sentences, but it was not evident whether all students completed the exit ticket.

Review team members observed a World History class for the first 20 minutes of the class period. A total of five students were present in class during the observation. Four out of five students were engaged at the start of the lesson, and one student was completely disengaged. The teacher attempted to engage the student several times, but the student eventually fell asleep. There was no evidence of recent student work posted on the walls. Class procedures and some instructional resources were on display in the classroom. The lesson objective and agenda were posted on the whiteboard. The lesson objective did not relate to any content standards or specific skills that students would use or gain. The class did not begin with a warm-up activity. The class was learning about pre-colonial times in the Western Hemisphere. The mode of instruction observed was lecture. The teacher projected slides about the lesson as he lectured. The teacher used questioning on two occasions to check for understanding; the same student answered the questions on both occasions.

Review team members observed a Physical Science class that was already in progress for five minutes. Three students were present in class during the observation. All students were on-task during the observation. Recent student work and instructional resources were on display in the classroom. The lesson objective and agenda were posted on the whiteboard. The lesson objective did not relate to any content standards or specific skills that students would use or gain. Students worked independently on a project that required them to write an essay about a compound that starts with the same letter as their last name. Students could receive bonus

points for presenting a PowerPoint deck along with their essay. The teacher provided a handout that explained the project and also provided students with a rubric for how the project would be graded.

<u>Academic Success Questions with Students</u>

Review team members met with two graduating seniors and one sophomore student who were selected by Liguori Academy Fortis to participate in the Academic Success Questions with Students. All three of the students had previously dropped out of comprehensive high schools prior to enrolling at Liguori Academy Fortis. When asked what makes this program different compared to their former schools, students talked about the "caring environment" at Liguori Academy Fortis. Students feel that the program staff and teachers truly care about them, both inside and outside of the classroom. Students also prefer the smaller program size because they get more one-on-one time with teachers and staff. Students think that their teachers have a good understanding of how much work they can handle, but they do not necessarily feel that they are being pushed too hard. All three students have postsecondary plans after they graduate and they all noted that the program is assisting them with their plans. One graduating senior expressed interest in earning a business degree and has applied to several schools with the help of the program's Postsecondary Coordinator. The other graduating senior has entrepreneurial aspirations and talked about how impressed he is by the program's connections to real professionals. Liguori Academy Fortis partners with numerous individuals and philanthropic organizations to provide additional resources and career exposure for students. The sophomore student noted that she is focused on staying on-track in school, and she has aspirations of earning a nursing degree after graduation. Overall, the students are happy about the respect they are shown by program staff and they told us that they "feel loved" at Liguori Academy Fortis, which is not something they experienced before dropping out of their previous high schools.

<u>Academic Success Questions with Teachers</u>

Ms. Sandra (Spanish teacher) and Mr. Ryan (Social Studies teacher) participated in the Academic Success Questions with Teachers. The teachers discussed the personalized nature of the curriculum. They noted that students are able to go through Edgenuity courses at their own pace, and that students receive support from teachers that are specifically tailored to their individual needs. The teachers talked about monitoring students' progress in Edgenuity to determine specific areas of strength and weaknesses. Ms. Sandra monitors her students' progress throughout each school day and sends students messages when they are falling behind or not spending enough time in the lessons. Ms. Sandra talked about developing lessons for concepts that are more difficult to learn on the computer, such as verb conjugation and word pronunciation. Mr. Ryan currently teaches African American History, which is not offered in the Edgenuity platform. Therefore, Mr. Ryan develops his own curriculum using the School District of Philadelphia's curriculum for African American Studies. Mr. Ryan uses Google Classroom to give students warm-up activities, exit questions, checks for understanding, and quizzes. Mr. Ryan noted that his students tend to respond well to projects, and he talked about a new project that he would be starting with the class soon. Both teachers reported receiving a lot of support from administrators and peers. The staff is very small, which allows everyone to communicate daily. The program staff formally meets once a week to have professional development or to develop program-wide improvement strategies. Teachers noted a recent professional development on Bloom's Taxonomy that was delivered by the program's Special Education teacher. In addition, teachers also recalled a recent professional development session that focused

on addressing the social-emotional needs of students. Ms. Sandra and Mr. Ryan discussed using modifications for all of their students, even those without IEPs. They recognized the individual learning needs of each student and they work to ensure instruction is customized to address those needs. Overall, teachers thought that the program is doing well in its first year. They considered the vision and mission of the school's founder and principal to be unique and meaningful. They both look forward to returning to the program next year and working with their peers and administrators to continuously improve and refine Liguori Academy Fortis.

Recommendations

The review team recommends that Liguori Academy Fortis continue to build upon the safe and caring learning environment that it has established for students who have not been successful in other high schools. Program leaders should aggressively work to improve academic rigor and create cohesion across all content areas. The review team recommends that the program work to standardize lesson plans and continue to develop teachers to deliver differentiated and engaging instruction. To promote more engaging direct instruction, the program should ensure that lessons incorporate a significant degree of student voice so that students are active in their learning and teachers serve as facilitators and guides. Finally, the review team recommends that Liguori Academy Fortis continues to develop meaningful partnerships with individuals and philanthropic organizations who have contributed significant resources and time to the program.