

## EDGEUNITY: A FACT SHEET

### This fall, contractor Edgenuity will be providing remote instruction for all 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade Providence students whose families opt for distance learning. What is Edgenuity?

- Edgenuity is a Scottsdale, AZ-based education services company founded in 1998<sup>1</sup> and acquired in 2018 as a portfolio company by private equity firm Silver Lake Partners.<sup>2</sup> The company specializes in online courseware, with curricula offerings focused on credit/dropout recovery. Edgenuity's website now also advertises reopening-focused products and services: "Build Your School Reopening Plans with Edgenuity® Online Curriculum + Learning Solutions."<sup>3,4</sup>
- The School Board voted in August to contract with Edgenuity® to provide remote instruction.<sup>5</sup> The initial contract will cost \$64,500 for 500 high school students, with an additional \$20 per additional student (up to \$100,500.)<sup>6</sup> Approximately 6,500 students are enrolled in the district's Virtual Learning Academy (VLA) for 100% remote learning through Jan 2021.<sup>7</sup>

### Edgenuity's program for Providence: Self-paced software. Not connected to the child's normal school or teachers. Instructional software program includes no interaction with fellow students.

- All students in the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades whose families chose the VLA will be instructed through Edgenuity software. vs. distance learning from a Providence teacher, as in the Spring.<sup>8</sup>
- VLA students will not be part of an interacting online group with peers. Daily instruction will be through a self-paced learning program, a method the district calls "learning in a digital space."<sup>9</sup> On its Virtual Learning Academy webpage, the district states, "Students in the Virtual Learning Academy are not considered to be associated with a particular school."<sup>10</sup>

### Parent confusion about the district's Virtual Learning Academy and its conditions

- Parents had an Aug. 19 deadline to sign up for the VLA. They had to commit for the entire first semester,<sup>11</sup> even though the state postponed a decision on reopening schools until Aug. 31.<sup>12</sup> Many parents and students who signed up for the VLA have said that they believed they were selecting the same kind of virtual learning offered in the Spring.
- The district states that families may continue in the VLA/Edgenuity program through the full school year, but cannot switch out of the program partway through the semester.<sup>13</sup> The district has said it will

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<sup>1</sup> <https://craft.co/edgenuity-inc>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/silver-lake-and-weld-north-education-announce-strategic-partnership-300577463.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.edgenuity.com>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.edgenuity.com/solutions/school-reopening-plan/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.wpri.com/health/coronavirus/school-updates/5000-students-enroll-in-providence-virtual-learning-academy/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.wpri.com/health/coronavirus/school-updates/5000-students-enroll-in-providence-virtual-learning-academy/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.wpri.com/health/coronavirus/august-31-ri-coronavirus-update/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.wpri.com/health/coronavirus/school-updates/5000-students-enroll-in-providence-virtual-learning-academy/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://reopenpvschools.org/virtual-learning-academy/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://reopenpvschools.org/virtual-learning-academy/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://reopenpvschools.org/virtual-learning-academy/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.wpri.com/health/coronavirus/school-updates/deadline-looms-for-providence-students-to-enroll-in-new-all-virtual-school/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://reopenpvschools.org/virtual-learning-academy/>

not guarantee that students who opt out of the VLA midway through the current school year will have a seat at their original school until Fall 2021.<sup>14</sup>

- The VLA option requires that every student have a learning “coach” (such as a parent) whose duties include setting up a parent account, reviewing the student's work before it is submitted, and assisting the student in trouble-shooting computer problems or answering course-related questions.<sup>15</sup> For many Providence parents, working in essential roles and/or parents do not speak English as a first language, the coach role will be especially challenging.

### Concerns about the virtual-learning model and Edgenuity’s performance in Ventura, Milwaukee, Mississippi

- There isn’t an extensive track record yet for companies contracting with districts to provide or consult on virtual learning during the pandemic. However, examples and experience will emerge from districts that contract with Edgenuity to provide online learning this year.
- In California’s Ventura County Unified School district, the Foothill Technology High School student newspaper ran an opinion piece in which a teacher was quoted calling Edgenuity “mind numbing and robotic.”<sup>16</sup> 1,408 students signed a Change.org petition asking the district to stop using Edgenuity.<sup>17</sup>
- A 2015 study of a cohort of 1,224 ninth graders in Chicago compared results for the virtual (vs. in-person) instructional model for credit recovery (in this case the virtual program was offered by another contractor, not Edgenuity). That study shows that students in the virtual program performed worse than their in-person counterparts.<sup>18</sup>
- Research on Milwaukee’s credit recovery program—which used the Edgenuity platform—found “taking the classes ... appeared to actually hurt students’ year-end math and reading scores.”<sup>19</sup> Per a Chalkbeat article on the program: *“The classes were a ‘dumping ground,’ a number of teachers said.”*
- A Feb. 2019 Hechinger Report article examined Mississippi districts’ increasing use of Edgenuity and similar programs to offset a teacher shortage. Among the concerns reported: A lack of an in-person expert teacher to answer questions, lead discussions, and assist students who are struggling, and “facilitators” unfamiliar with the content.<sup>20</sup> One student quoted in the article said: *“It’s hard because ain’t nobody really teaching...If I’ve got question to ask, how you do that? I can’t ask the computer...”*<sup>21</sup>
- The article quotes Jeremiah Smith, founder of an afterschool and summer program, the Rosedale [Mississippi] Freedom Project: *When students don’t have qualified teachers investing in them, the way they evaluate their dignity and ability to learn is affected, [Smith] said. “It’s a broader trend for how we treat kids ... in Title I schools and black kids and kids who grew up in poverty. It’s just this general sense that the best that you could do is to check boxes.”*<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> <https://reopenpvdschools.org/virtual-learning-academy/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.providenceschools.org/cms/lib/RI01900003/Centricity/Domain/4/PVA%20Learning%20Coach%20Responsibilities.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://foothilldragonpress.org/271443/opinion/c71-paac/opinion-edgenuity-is-not-an-adequate-platform-for-online-learning/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.change.org/p/ventura-unified-school-district-vusd-stop-using-edgenuity>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19345747.2016.1168500?journalCode=uree20>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2019/5/20/21108176/this-school-district-outsourced-many-of-its-high-school-courses-to-an-online-program-but-it-s-not-cl>

<sup>20</sup> <https://hechingerreport.org/teacher-shortages-force-districts-to-use-online-education-programs/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://hechingerreport.org/teacher-shortages-force-districts-to-use-online-education-programs/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://hechingerreport.org/teacher-shortages-force-districts-to-use-online-education-programs/>