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American Heritage School to open campus near downtown Salt Lake City in 2022

Private school hopes location, scholarships will increase the diversity of those enrolled

By Tad Walch | @Tad_Walch | Jul 20, 2021, 11:56am MDT



The exterior of the American Heritage School in American Fork, Utah, is pictured on Friday, October 29, 2004. The private school based on Latter-day Saint doctrines and values will open a Salt Lake City campus in August 2022. | Deseret News Archives

A private school that has infused Latter-day Saint teachings into elementary and secondary education for half a century will open a campus in Salt Lake City next year.

The American Heritage School will lease a building from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints two blocks from Temple Square, school officials said. The school is independent from the church.

The building is currently a stake center for the church and will be repurposed to serve as a K-8 school beginning in fall 2022. School officials plan to add high school students as soon as possible, said Grant Beckwith, American Heritage's head of school.

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Beckwith said the new campus will help American Heritage reach a more diverse set of students 40 miles north of its existing location.

“The Salt Lake campus will allow us to advance our mission of accessibility to our school in a way we can’t do from American Fork,” he said. “Donor fundraising to pay for scholarships for students will be a major part of this effort and help us reach a wider range of socio-economic students.”

American Heritage recently celebrated its 50th year. The school was launched by a group of Brigham Young University professors in 1970 after the university closed BY High and BY Elementary.

American Heritage already is one of the largest private schools in Utah. The school's campus in American Fork provides K-12 education for 1,100 students on 40 acres.



American Heritage School provides Latter-day Saint-based education for 1,100 students on 40 acres directly across the street from the church's Mount Timpanogos Temple in American Fork, Utah. The school plans to open a Salt Lake City campus in August 2022. | American Heritage School screen capture

American Heritage is a not-for-profit school that accepts no federal, state or local tax funds.

However, it has a powerful history of donor support. The school has raised \$100 million since 2001, according to its website. Donors cover all of the school's capital expenses and will pay for any necessary retrofit of the Salt Lake building, located at 142 W. 200 North, Beckwith said. Tuition covers teacher salaries and curriculum needs.

Last year, high school tuition cost \$9,717. The cost was lower for middle school (\$8,233) and first through sixth grades (\$7,922). Donations cover significant financial aid for many students. Interested families can review the admissions process at american-heritage.org/admissions-process.

The school pioneered both a worldwide home-school curriculum and software to deliver a full K-12 online education. American Heritage Worldwide has 5,000 students in 49 states and 36 countries and offers parents what Beckwith called a "swinging door model." Students can move their education on and off campus if they move or have other needs.

The curriculum emphasizes an appreciation for America's founding and the Latter-day Saint belief that the gospel of Jesus Christ and his church have been restored to earth

through Joseph Smith and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Church members comprise 97% of the student body. As at its American Fork campus, students at the Salt Lake campus will wear uniforms and follow an honor code.

“The American heritage story is a Christian story,” Beckwith said. “We are focused on America’s Christian heritage.”

He said interest in the school has increased in recent years even as more Americans say they no longer affiliate with a church.

“This is an interesting inflection point for faith communities and those who feel faith historically is not represented well,” Beckwith said. “Our goal is to engage parents and help them provide an education that fits their values.”

The school leader said the Salt Lake campus location will help be a boon to its curriculum.

“We’re excited to be close to Temple Square with all of its publicly available resources like the Church History Museum and Family History Library.”

August 2022 opening planned

The new principal of the Salt Lake campus will be Leland Anderson, who said the goal is to open in August 2022 with 200-250 students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

Anderson earned a master’s degree in school leadership at Harvard and an English teaching degree from BYU. He recently finished a five-year stint as head of school at the Shenzhen RDF International School in China. He grew up in the Salt Lake Valley and said he is excited to help establish American Heritage in Salt Lake City.

Anderson is confident Salt Lake City’s density will help the school reach its student goal as more families move downtown. The school also expects to attract families from the rest of the Salt Lake Valley and Davis County.

“There actually are more children living within one mile, five miles, 10 miles of the Salt Lake campus than the American Fork campus,” Beckwith said, “if parents are willing to drive a little ways.”

History shows parents will drive farther. This year the American Fork campus had students who commuted from as far north as Bountiful and as far south as Nephi.

Beckwith said the school expects to meet next week with Salt Lake City's planning department once a lease is finalized. Then it will hire architects and construction companies to bring the building up to code for a school.

Beckwith said the school plans to begin hiring teachers for the Salt Lake campus in spring 2022. The Salt Lake campus will offer after-school orchestra, choir, athletics and summer school programs.

The American Heritage School's 2020 senior class scored an average of 26 on the ACT; the Utah average is 20. Of those who applied to BYU, 80% were admitted, according to the school's annual report.

The chairman of the American Heritage School board of trustees, Dan Burton, said the board looks forward to adding a campus in Utah's capital city.

"We are excited to provide families working and living in and around downtown Salt Lake another option to educate their children," he said, "and we are grateful to add to the diverse and rich education ecosystem that has been a hallmark of the Salt Lake area for many years."



ChurchBeat with Tad Walch

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