

Sent: Wednesday, April 12, 1:11 PM

Dear Parents of High School Students,

Next Tuesday morning, a special standards assembly will be held for high school students, the topic of which—while important and necessary—is sensitive and requires advance disclosure to you. This email will detail the assembly’s content, our objectives for holding the assembly, and various ways for parents and students to participate (or not) in the assembly. If—after reviewing the questions and answers listed below—you have any continuing questions or concerns not addressed herein, please reach out to me directly (I will be happy to make time to listen).

Thanks,
Mr. Hale

Questions & Answers

1—What is the assembly’s purpose?


As part of our ongoing effort to live out the tenets of our Honor Code’s anchor scripture (Matthew 22:37-39), we are having an assembly that addresses how we achieve the Savior’s directive to “love thy neighbour as thyself.” This assembly will make particular emphasis on those neighbors whose life circumstances, attributes, or feelings can lead to actual or perceived marginalization. I will be moderating a panel discussion that will include three AHS faculty members: one who experiences same-sex attraction, one who is a racial minority, and one who has been divorced. Planning for this assembly is the product of a counseled, multi-month process that includes both administration and board support.

2—What are our objectives for this assembly?

We hope to impress upon our audience in the following ways:

- We hope students become aware of how innocent behaviors or comments can cause some to feel marginalized. We hope this knowledge helps students to be more informed and measured in their future speech and interactions as we strive to foster a greater sense of welcoming and belonging within our community.
- We want to equip students with understanding of how to show love to those whose experiences and circumstances are different from their own.
- We hope those students who wonder if they are welcome will leave the assembly with new resolve that AHS is a community that sees them as children of God—possessing great worth.
- We hope to model for our students the need to subscribe to revelatory channels rather than human voices that represent either extreme (anger or permissiveness) when seeking to understand the delicate and crucial balance between love and law.
- We hope to provide answers to some of the questions undoubtedly on students’ minds, and we hope to do so in ways that are faith affirming/amplifying.

3—Will the assembly have a liberal or a conservative philosophical angle?

Neither. We will not be viewing these topics through the lens of any particular philosophy of men. We are fortunate that living prophets have given us an abundance of direction in these complicated matters, and we intend to give ample time for their voices to be heard and for the principles the Savior teaches through them to direct our approach. Please  [click here](#) to review the slide deck we will be using to get a sense for how we intend to allow revealed knowledge to prevail in this forum.

4—What conclusions will we draw in this assembly?

We will not allow opinions to be presented as fact. When necessary, we will draw a clear distinction between what we know (through revelatory channels) and what we do not know. We will not be afraid to say, “we just don’t know” when addressing certain questions. We can point out that the Church has issued policy that effectively says “we just don’t know” with respect to certain aspects of these complicated issues.


5—Does this assembly represent a solution looking for a problem, or does a problem really exist here?

While we are incredibly pleased with an unusually loving community and culture, we are not perfect; we do receive reports of concerning behavior that runs contrary to our honor code, and we therefore need to take the time to reinforce the imperative of treating others with respect and charity. Most of our students get it. Some are still learning (often they are attempting to gain acceptance by being funny, and they are not yet mature enough to realize the fine line between humor and harm). Because we are a school community, we know that once we have trained one group of students (in any lesson), they graduate and are replaced by a new group. Thus, we will never be done with the work of training charity.

6—How were panelists selected?

All three panelists have a few important attributes in common:

- Each is a member of a subcommittee to the school’s Board of Trustees that focuses on guiding the school community in the direction of loving our neighbor.
- Each possesses a characteristic (life circumstances, physical attributes, or feelings) that can sometimes lead to actual or perceived marginalization within a community whose members have a great deal in common.
- Each lives out the school’s mission mandate that “All teachers, staff, administrators, and trustees shall strive be living examples of the values, principles, and skills taught at the school.” To be even more specific, each has chosen the path of discipleship, has entered into and strives to maintain sacred temple covenants, and looks to Christ as a God who is perfectly just and perfectly merciful, the giver of divine law and the source of divine love.

Please  [click here](#) to review the bios for our three panelists.

7—What kinds of questions will be addressed by the panel?

My primary job, as moderator, will be to establish a tone that is positive and constructive toward our stated objectives. I will also be managing the flow by jumping between my own questions and those submitted in advance by students. Following are a few examples of the kinds of questions I will use to set the desired tone:

- Tell us about a time when someone said or did something small and simple that made a huge difference to you, leading you to feel included, wanted, or needed.

- Tell us about a time when someone said or did something inadvertently or unwittingly—maybe they didn't even know the definition or full meaning of the words they were using—that caused you to feel like you didn't belong or weren't wanted or needed.
- In light of the life circumstances, physical attributes, or feelings that make you unique, what has been a blessing you have received from being part of the AHS community?
- During times when you may have felt like you were on the outside looking in, what helped you to keep your faith and maintain your membership in the Church?
- What encouragement would you like to offer to the high schooler in today's audience who is experiencing the same or similar challenges that you faced?

8—How will student questions be gathered in advance?

This Friday, history teachers will briefly introduce the assembly topic to their classes. They will review parts of the assembly slide deck as well as the panelist bios before giving students 2-3 minutes to anonymously write any questions they may have on a 3" x 5" note card. Note cards will then be collected and delivered back to administration for review. Administration will only consider questions that are constructive to the assembly's stated objectives, and priority will be given to those questions that are most common across the student body.

9—What are the various options for attending the assembly?

While we believe this assembly will be beneficial for our broad community as well as for the vast majority of individuals who make up that community, we trust parents to know what is best for their specific child. This assembly will be held in the K-5 building Rec Hall at 8:30 a.m. on Tuesday, April 18. Following are some participation options we want to make available to provide parents with maximum flexibility and transparency:

- No Participation – We will be on the morning assembly bell schedule, so students who do not participate in the assembly can simply delay their arrival until first period begins at 9:30 a.m.
- Remote/Delayed Participation – This assembly will be recorded and live streamed. Students unable to attend in person can watch the assembly from either a remote location or on a delayed basis by [clicking here](#).
- Parent Participation – Parents are welcome to attend the assembly in person, watch the assembly's live stream (by [clicking here](#) during the assembly), or watch the delayed recording of the assembly (by [clicking here](#) after the assembly is over). We invite and encourage parents to watch the assembly in one form or another to help fuel the next-level, one-on-one conversations between parent and child that can go further and accomplish more than is possible in a narrowly structured assembly intended for a broad audience.

10—Why hold this assembly at all? Why not leave this sort of thing to the home environment?

When it comes to sensitive topics, the school strives to say as little as is necessary. While we will never get into the low-level details that must be reserved for the home, we will say enough to clarify our standards; this is imperative to maintaining the culture and environment that produces the fruits we so enjoy.

So, how does the school strike the appropriate balance on sensitive topics? How does the school define the limits between its own scope and that of parents on these or other sensitive issues? When the school does address sensitive topics, we limit ourselves to the scope and the vocabulary the Church uses when it approaches the youth on the same topics. We look to publicly available documents like the *For*

the Strength of Youth pamphlet or *The Family: A Proclamation to the World* to guide us in understanding that important boundary.

We too are parents, and we often wish we could delay addressing some of these topics with our own children. We also know that the adversary is not taking a slow, objective, or quiet approach toward our children, and for us to hesitate or be silent on these matters is to concede to him a monopoly at the microphone. We therefore choose to provide correct information to counter the many erroneous voices hitting our children on a daily basis that come from the world's incessant and over-saturated communication channels. We must remember that, as a collective of parents, we have chosen this new norm where the immense power of the smart phone now resides in the pocket of almost every high schooler—the countermeasures we employed a decade ago may not be sufficient today.

While we are confident in the need to speak up, we also know a one-size-fits-all approach isn't perfect, and timing is an important parental consideration. For that reason, we trust parents to make individualized choices about their children's participation that they—in their love and wisdom—know will be best. We have thus provided a variety of participation options and are giving parents advance notice.

11—Are there materials I could review with my child to develop the conversation further?

Given our insistence on framing this assembly through the lens of revealed knowledge rather than the philosophies of men, we would encourage parents to consider material produced by the Church and its leaders. Following are a few items we have consulted in our preparations, which parents might also find helpful:

- [For the Strength of Youth](#).
 - See pages 10-15 for the chapter entitled “Love God, love your neighbor.”
 - See page 12 for the section addressing racism.
 - See pages 27-28 for the section addressing same-sex attraction.
- [Love and Law](#) by [then Elder] Dallin H. Oaks, October 2009 General Conference.
- Two recent talks by Elder D. Todd Christofferson that almost seem like a part 1 and part 2 combination:
 - [The Doctrine of Belonging](#) by Elder D. Todd Christofferson, October 2022 General Conference.
 - [One in Christ](#) by Elder D. Todd Christofferson, April 2023 General Conference
- Recent words from our living prophet:
 - [Choices for Eternity](#) by President Russell M. Nelson, May 2022 Worldwide Devotional for Young Adults
 - [Peacemakers Needed](#) by President Russell M. Nelson, April 2023 General Conference
- [How Divine Identity Affects Belonging and Becoming](#) by Elder John C. Pingree Jr., March 2023 Liahona.

Thank You,
Chase Hale
Principal – American Fork Campus



Character › Scholarship › Liberty

736 North 1100 East

American Fork, UT 84003

(801) 642-0055 ext. 302

(801) 642-0060 fax

chale@ahsmail.com

www.american-heritage.org