

Deseret News

Utah County school with Mormon values aims to go worldwide online

Published: Friday, Sept. 17, 2010 11:30 a.m. MDT

AMERICAN FORK — An American Fork private school designed around the principles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced plans Thursday to launch a distance education program that would make its curriculum available to students worldwide.

American Heritage School, 736 N. 1100 East, designed the program in response to inquiries from interested students across the seven continents, said Leland Anderson, assistant principal over distance education. The school serves about 600 students in grades kindergarten through 12.

"We feel that it's important to be a worldwide resource for parents and families who want this kind of education," Anderson said. "There aren't many schools that do what we do. We were getting calls on a weekly basis from Africa, from China, from Canada asking, 'When are you going to build a school here?'"

The announcement comes at a time when many private schools in the country, feeling the effects of the recession, are downsizing. Largely due to its faith-centered approach to education, Leland said, American Heritage has continued to grow. In 2009, the school expanded to include 11th and 12th grades and kicked off an international student program that has, thus far, attracted 30 students from places as far away as Korea, France, India, Venezuela and Japan.

"We do believe that the recession, while it may be long and it may be deep, won't negate the need for a good, faith-based education," Anderson said. "There is still a great deal of interest in a school that educates not just minds, but also hearts."

Inside American Heritage, everything about 10th-grade teacher Nick Gentile's classroom speaks to the school's goals.

In the course of one literature lecture, Gentile skips from Shakespeare to the Bible to The Book of Mormon. Above the whiteboard at the front of the room, he's put together an illustrated of history that begins with "The Creation" and ends with "The Second Coming." On his bookcase, Charles Dickens and Jane Austen share shelf space with "The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson" and archives of The Ensign, a monthly magazine published by LDS Church.

The class outline Gentile put together for "Modern World History from 1600," the distance education course he teaches for American Heritage, is similarly peppered with references to the LDS faith. Required reading ranges from primary source documents like Rousseau's 1762 "The Social Contract" to the Doctrine & Covenants, a book of revelations received by LDS Church founder Joseph Smith.

"In all things we strive for character education from the perspective of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ," Gentile said. "We don't just read books to understand the plot and setting and literary devices; we read them for principles that can be applied to our lives."

Three hundred students from the United States and Canada have already signed up for classes through American Heritage School's distance education program. The school offers nearly 50 courses ranging from Kindergarten Art, which costs \$55, to Gentile's advanced history course, which costs \$315.

Included in many of the courses, is weekly one-on-one time with one of American Heritage School's certified instructors. Some classes are self-paced. Others include live online class times.

"This is not a one-size-fits-all approach," Anderson said. "This is great, online-based instruction that can be customized to fit the needs of anyone from the home schooled child living in a rural setting to

the mother of six striving to be a life-long learner."

For more information, visit www.american-heritage.org.

e-mail: estuart@desnews.com

© 2010 Deseret News Publishing Company | All rights reserved