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Private school playing expansion tune

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AMERICAN FORK — Stop the presses. Not everyone in education is talking cutbacks.

American Heritage School, a privately run institution based on the values of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, announced plans this week to drop \$4 million on an expansion project that will change it from a K-10 to a K-12. The school, located in American Fork, is also planning to absorb the orchestra program from The Music School, which shut down last September after investors yanked funding.

"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," said LeLand Anderson, assistant principal at American Heritage. "There is still a great deal of interest in a school that educates not just minds, but also hearts."

Many American Heritage students and parents have been holding their breath for years, hoping for the school to expand, he said.

Kaden Caldwell, a 17-year-old student from Highland, is advanced enough to be considered a junior, but is retaking 10th grade classes just so he can stay at American Heritage.

"I went to American Fork High last year for 10th grade, but I wanted God in my education," Caldwell said. "I sensed the importance of that, so I got a couple of jobs and now I'm paying for my own tuition."

He's not the only one in Utah County feeling the school's faith-centered curriculum.

Open enrollment at the 480-student school hasn't even begun and Anderson's already received more applications than the facility can handle. In addition to the increase of high school students, administrators expect American Heritage's elementary program to grow at least one class per level.

That community support, Anderson said, made it possible for the school to upsize debt free. Most of the cash to pay for the expansion came from donations.

"Frankly, building is cheaper right now," he said. "We figure, while we have investors who are willing to back us, we should go for it."

Remodel plans include a state-of-the-art orchestra and choir facility to accommodate The Music School's three orchestras, a reading recovery room and an art facility.

"American Heritage has a dedication to the arts far beyond what I imagined for any private academic institution," said Kayson Brown, who directs the audition-only orchestras formerly housed at The Music School.

Brown said he "threw his hands up" when he learned in September that he and the rest of the faculty at The Music School would be out of jobs and a month's back pay. He didn't give up, however, and his orchestras, which will partner this year with the Utah Symphony and the Deer Valley Music Festival, never missed a practice. After just a week of renting studio space to rehearse, Brown got a call from American Heritage.

"I'm really excited to see what we can accomplish together," he said. "This is a great, community oriented place."

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