

American Fork private school celebrates growth with dedication of new facilities

Braley Dodson Daily Herald
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American Heritage School's new 1,200-seat Patriot Arena is a far cry from the faith-based school's humble beginnings in an old chapel in Pleasant Grove.

On Wednesday, the school celebrated the first phase of a three-phase expansion of the school, which has added an arena, a 1,200-seat football and soccer stadium, track and field facilities, four tennis courts and a baseball field with a dedication ceremony that gave thanks to both the school's founders and God.



"You are the children of liberty they sacrificed for," said Laurie Swim, one of the school's trustees, during the dedication ceremony Wednesday afternoon. "You are the children of liberty they built for."

Future phases for the school will include constructing a small theater, a concert hall, classrooms, a student commons and administrative offices.

The American Fork private school is located across the street from the Mount Timpanogos Utah Temple and offers families a faith-based education aligned with the beliefs of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The expansion adds 30 acres to the school, bringing the campus to 40 acres. The \$30 million project was funded by private donors.

Jim Jacob, a former chairman of the school's board of trustees, told the crowd of students, employees, parents and alumni Wednesday about the school's first days in 1970. He said the school began with a \$1,000 down payment on the Pleasant Grove chapel that had asbestos in the heating system, which required a founder to rent a hazmat suit and pull it out by hand. Books were recovered from a riverbed in Phoenix, and a donation from a Provo school led to American Heritage School's first library.

“Many teachers worked for almost nothing because there wasn’t much money to go around,” Jacob said.

The school enrolls more than 850 students and educates thousands more through an online program. It’s enrollment has grown by 15 percent each year.

The addition of the new facilities will allow students to create further achievements in athletics, according to Grant Beckwith, the school’s principal.

“The school has historically been very strong in its academics and in its performing arts,” Beckwith said.

The idea for the new facilities has been in the works for the past decade, with the idea coming together within the last three years.

Beckwith said the school has raised \$76 million since 2001 and has raised \$500,000 for financial aid.

He said the school is open to the community through after-school programs and events.

At the dedication ceremony, Beckwith introduced a statue of Nathan Hale, the Revolutionary War soldier who famously stated before his death that his only regret was that he had only one life to give for his country, that will be installed at the school.

“He is the personification of our kind of patriot,” Beckwith said.

Rachel Beus, a second grade teacher at the school, told the crowd at the ceremony that it is an honor to teach at the school and help students understand their divine purposes.

She said that earlier in the year a boy raised his hand in class to share an example he had learned from scripture study with his family. Beus said moments like that, even when they move the course of a lesson, inspire her.

“I know as it happens that’s when true learning takes place as the spirit is present,” Beus said.

Joseph and Karina Andersen, who were in the school’s second graduating senior class in 2012, shared their gratitude for the faith-based school.

Joseph Andersen said he still vividly remembers the teachers and classmates who helped him. The Andersens met at the school and have two children.

“The things we learned here have a great impact on how we teach and lead as parents,” Joseph Andersen said.

Karina Andersen said the school was an “oasis of light” after she moved to Utah from Kansas.

“I will always and forever be grateful for the American Heritage education I gained,” she said.



Students at American Heritage say the Pledge of Allegiance during the high school building and campus dedication ceremony on Wednesday, April 10, 2019, in American Fork.

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Grant Beckwith, the principal at American Heritage School, addresses the attendees of the building and campus dedication ceremony on Wednesday, April 10, 2019, in American Fork.

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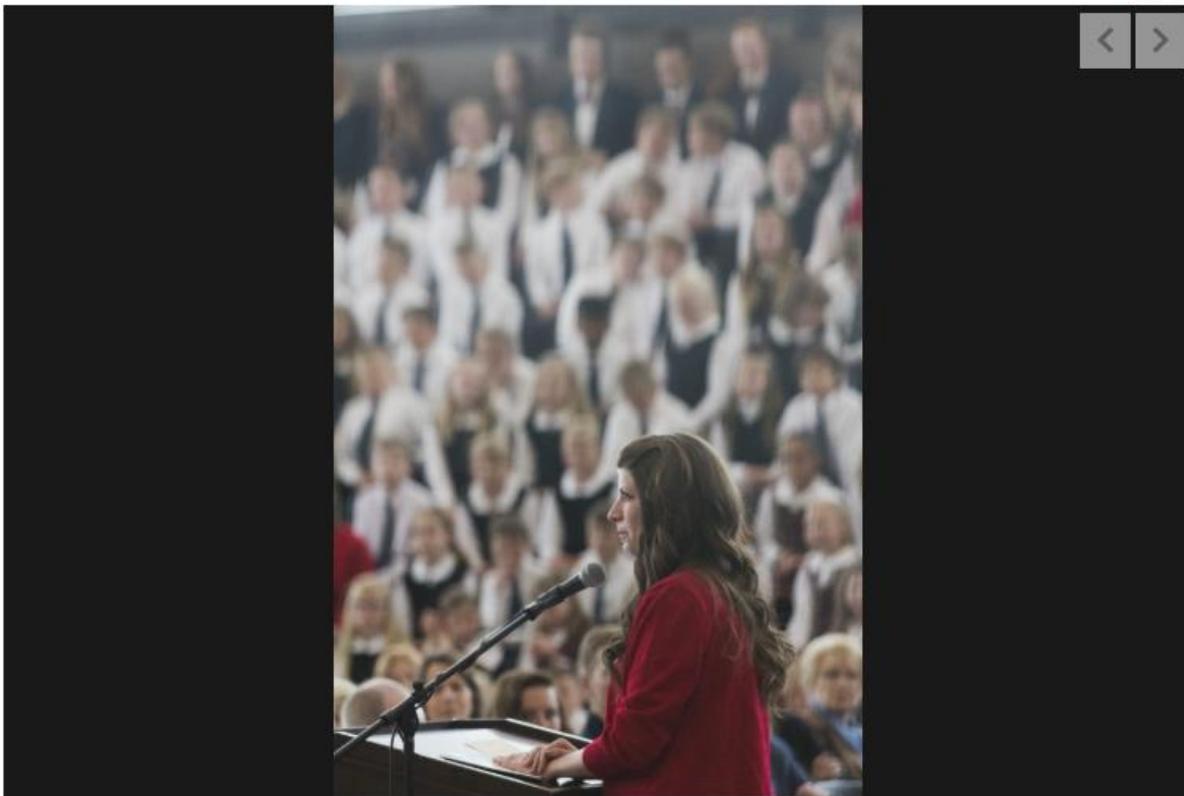
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Students at American Heritage School bow their heads in prayer at the end of the building and campus dedication ceremony on Wednesday, April 10, 2019, in American Fork.

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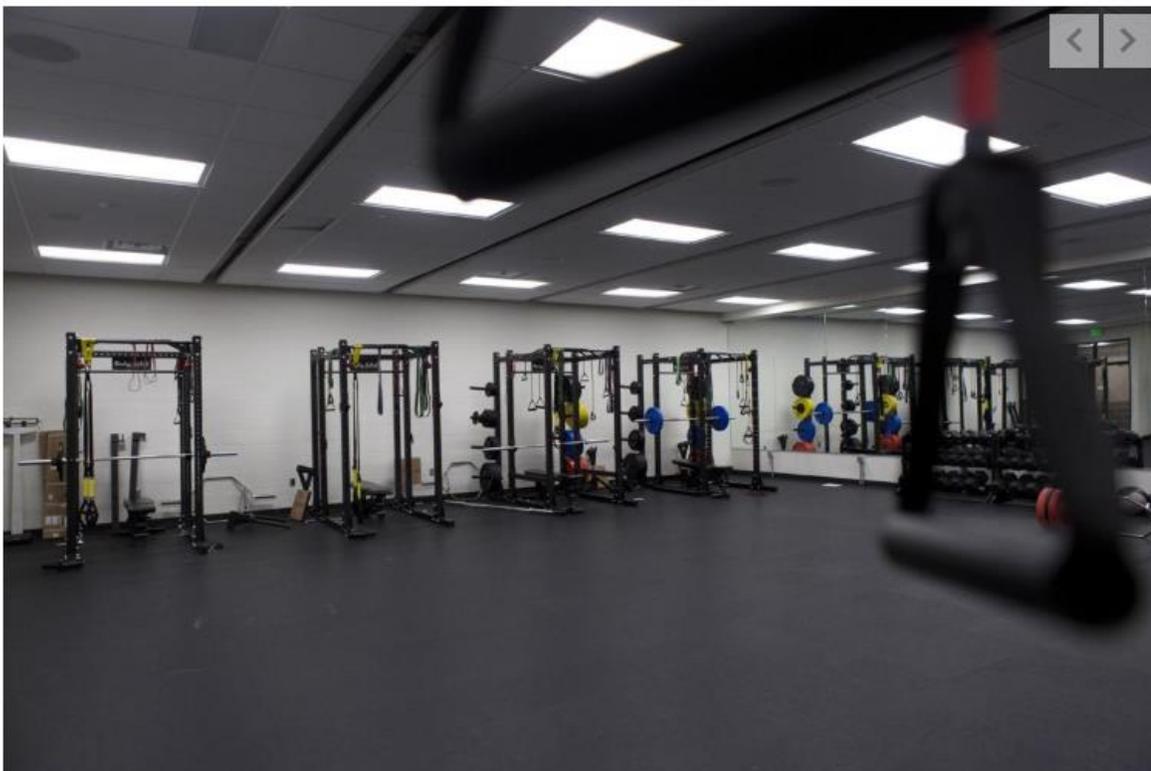
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Rachel Beus, a teacher at American Heritage School, speaks during the building and campus dedication ceremony on Wednesday, April 10, 2019, in American Fork.

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The weight room in the new American Heritage High School building is pictured on Wednesday, April 10, 2019, in American Fork.

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A hallway in the new American Heritage High School building is pictured on Wednesday, April 10, 2019, in American Fork.

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Students and staff at American Heritage School rush inside of the new high school building during a storm on Wednesday, April 10, 2019, in American Fork.

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