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## LDS-based Private School Adds Mentoring to Curriculum

Caleb Warnock - DAILY HERALD



Sharon Scanland, a core classroom teacher at American Heritage School in American Fork, leads an eighth-grade mentor class on a discussion on scholars Friday, April 2, 2009

**AMERICAN FORK** -- "Ladies and gentlemen, it is not wisdom to be only wise and on the inward vision close the eyes. You need to decide just how much a member of the second Army of Helaman you are going to be."

Referencing both the 19th-century poet George Santayana and the Book of Mormon, Sharon Scanland is teaching her mentor students at American Heritage School in American Fork the importance of reflexive listening, and learning with the heart.

Mentoring is not just a fad word here, but an actual class taken by all seventh- and eighth-grade students. The idea is to help the teachers build a stronger relationship with the students, and the students build a stronger relationship with the lifelong process of learning.

Mentor teachers focus on "how the students are feeling about life, where they are at, and where they are going, and helping them connect with education being an internal pursuit and not just an external pursuit imposed on them," said assistant principal Shirley Kauffman. "Learning is lifelong, so it has to be enjoyable."

The mentor program was begun as an experiment last year. The fruit of the program was on display recently when one AHS student, Hannah Waddel, attended the regional spelling bee. Between one of the late rounds, Hannah was greeted in the audience by not only family and friends looking to buoy her up and encourage her, but by Scanland, her AHS mentor.

Scanland attended the spelling bee on her own time to encourage Waddel because she felt prompted to do so, Scanland said.

"We are so proud of you," Scanland said to her student that day. "You have such integrity. You are so full of grace."

AHS is an LDS-based private school, and Scanland said that to her, mentoring is more than a job, it is a calling.

"The spirit moved me that I needed to be there," Scanland said recently of her decision to attend the spelling bee. "I had a million things to do, but she needed to know I loved her and respected her not only here but beyond the school environment. She and I are children of our Heavenly Father, and our Heavenly Father would have us care for one another."

That theology is braided constantly into everything that is taught at AHS. In the classroom is a timeline of world history labeled "History: Christ and His Story." There is classroom prayer at the beginning, middle and end of the day. There are paintings depicting Jesus Christ on the walls, and a framed photo of Thomas S. Monson, president of the LDS Church. There is daily scripture memorization, and hanging at the front of the classroom are papers reading "God's principle of individuality," and "The Christian principle of self-government," and "America's heritage of Christian character," among many others.

The theology is also heavily threaded through the classroom discussion.

"And who are you, anyway?" Scanland poses to the 11 students in her mentoring class.

"A child of God," says eighth-grader Choe Johnson.

What is a mentor, Scanland asks.

"To me, mentoring is what God wants you to learn, so you can do what he needs you to do, and fulfill that for yourself and others," said eighth-grader Brittani Bills.

"And who is in charge of all learning, anyway?" said Scanland.

"God," answers the class.

"Jesus Christ is the ultimate mentor of us," said eighth-grader Hannah Tolman. "We must try to follow that."

"You will never be the same for the time you have spent here," Scanland said to one student. "You have grown to be a giant here. ... I know God will help every one of you remember who you are, and whose you are. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen."

And with that, the students are off to their next class, which on this day happened to be a student concert.

"I expect a performance worthy of a scholar," Scanland calls out to the students as they exit.

After the students have left, Scanland says that one reason she wanted to teach mentoring is because she did not want her students to have a junior high experience like her own.

"It was deadly," she said with emotion. "I know what I would have given" to have had a mentor teacher.

Whatever else her students may remember from her classroom, she strives to ensure they will "remember forever that they were loved and encouraged. ... It is not a perfect world and these children have so much more to deal with than I ever thought about, and that is why I call them the second Army of Helaman."

Almost 40 years old, American Heritage School is expanding to be a K-12 school within two years. Prices range from \$284 per month for kindergarten to \$400 a month for grades 9-11.

For information about American Heritage School, call (801) 642-0055 or visit [www.american-heritage.org](http://www.american-heritage.org).