



Portrait of a USM Leader

University School of Milwaukee students know they have the capacity to lead. They understand that the world needs ethical leaders who can collaboratively solve complicated problems. They begin practicing necessary skills in prekindergarten classrooms and continue throughout their time at USM, as their spheres of influence widen and their individual interests define their paths—with teachers, coaches, and mentors preparing them for the challenges and joys that come with leadership.

Leadership is having the courage and integrity to take a stand, the vision and influence to inspire others, and the perseverance to create positive change. USM students learn to use their authentic selves to make a difference in the world. They know that leaders are diverse—some are quiet and some more vocal; some are up front and some behind the scenes. Leadership consists of both understanding and action, and our students learn that leadership and title are not always synonymous.

At USM, ethical leadership skills are developed in each of our students, every day. Developing leadership capacities involves continual growth and ongoing feedback. *Self*, *others*, and *community* are important relationships for effective leadership, and the Common Trust is the bedrock of these relationships. Leadership involves treating others with dignity, empathy, and care. From navigating group work skillfully, to welcoming a new classmate with warmth, to voicing an unpopular but substantiated point of view in a roundtable discussion, leadership development is pervasive throughout the PK-12 experience.

We know that leaders are not just born—they are made. They are 3 years old, 11 years old, and 18 years old. They are developed on USM's stages, athletic fields, classrooms, hallways, and dining rooms. They learn the elements and vocabulary of leadership, participate in mentorship, connect between classrooms and grade levels, interact with the larger community, and determine their individualized leadership journeys. Read on to see how USM students cultivate their understanding and practice of leadership in each of our divisions.



Portrait of a USM Leader: Preschool

USM Preschool students learn ...

- everyone has the ability to lead.
- everybody makes mistakes and can learn, grow, and recover from them.
- we must all take care of each other and ask for help at times.
- leadership requires us to be aware of our feelings and actions and the impact we have on others.

USM Preschool students practice ...

- treating others with the Common Trust values of respect, trust, honesty, fairness, and kindness.
- resolving conflict and frustration, including using words effectively.
- engaging in active listening and other important forms of communication.
- using leadership vocabulary in their daily classroom and community practices.
- taking care of themselves, others, and their communities by having important classroom responsibilities.

USM Preschool students experience ...

- the natural world and its rich opportunities for appropriate risk-taking and resilience-building, from handling a grasshopper alone to hiking USM trails with others.
- being a Wildcat Leader of the Day within the classroom, modeling behavior that demonstrates reliability, teamwork, and responsiveness through leading morning meetings, preparing for class transitions, and ensuring that classmates' needs are met with care and efficiency.
- partnering with "buddies" from older grades in mentoring relationships where they interact with more mature leaders and develop leadership skills themselves.
- serving as hosts on Grandparents and Special Friends Day and for visiting students, when they welcome important people to a caring, safe community.
- participating in dynamic community events, like monthly assemblies focused on social-emotional learning, where they share in the positive outcomes of ethical leadership.



Portrait of a USM Leader: Lower School

USM Lower School students learn ...

- everyone has the capacity to be a leader by embodying respect, trust, honesty, fairness, and kindness—the values of the Common Trust.
- respectful listening and effective communication positively impact our communities.
- leadership requires empathy, as well as the ability to recognize and honor similarities and differences with others.
- problem-solving is often collaborative and a responsibility of leadership.

USM Lower School students practice ...

- committing to the values of the Common Trust in daily choices.
- taking risks within nurturing environments to increase confidence through successes and to develop resilience in the face of setbacks.
- communicating individual ideas with peers and adults while also considering the viewpoints and contributions of others.
- using the vocabulary of leadership when defining their own choices, as well as labeling them in peers' actions.
- understanding characters' feelings and situations through fiction and nonfiction mentor texts, using modeled strategies and the language of decision-making and problem-solving.

USM Lower School students experience ...

- daily morning meeting discussions where they listen actively, respond to one another, and receive direct instruction on social-emotional learning.
- reciprocal, rich mentor and mentee relationships with “buddies” from younger grades, and Middle School and Upper School partnerships where they observe and foster intrapersonal and interpersonal leadership skills.
- serving inside and beyond the classroom with responsibilities that are an integral part of caring for the community, such as cleaning up, delivering Lower School announcements, filling milk glasses, and assisting younger students at our mix-aged dining tables.
- collaboratively planning and leading monthly assemblies with student-created poetry, group dances, story read-alouds, personal narrative speeches, and songs.
- signature projects within grade levels, such as kindergarten businesses, 1st grade rainforest presentations, 2nd grade leadership journals, and 3rd grade service learning, which scaffold essential leadership skills of research, reflection and application, analysis, and decision-making.
- year-long, individual 4th grade Tower Projects, with mentoring from 8th grade project partners and USM adults, culminating with Tower Talks and action components.
- opportunities to serve as 4th grade junior coaches who lead games, resolve conflicts, and foster community and belonging at recesses for kindergarten through 3rd grade students.



Portrait of a USM Leader: Middle School

USM Middle School students learn ...

- everyone should develop their capacity to lead, and leadership calls for empathy, courage, and commitment to the well-being of others.
- leadership requires reflection and the ability to receive and give feedback.
- personal responsibility and ethical decision-making are essential for leadership.
- leaders take risks, make mistakes, and learn and grow from those mistakes.
- leadership involves rewards and challenges.

USM Middle School students practice ...

- living by the Common Trust and treating others with dignity.
- becoming confident in who they are and how they can positively impact their communities.
- leading in small and large ways, from daily interactions with peers, teachers, and visitors, to acting as upstanders and engaging in community service projects.
- developing empathy by considering diverse perspectives and recognizing that, at times, there might be a difference between intent and impact.
- establishing a growth mindset, along with resilience, perseverance, and flexibility, which are needed by leaders.
- making ethical decisions, even when it is difficult or when nobody is watching.
- researching, analyzing, and problem-solving, individually and in collaboration with others, on projects that demand big thinking and complex solutions.

USM Middle School students experience ...

- discussions ranging from open session in advising to those about literature, history, science, and contemporary issues, modeled and facilitated to form connections and broaden perspectives while also developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- analyzing powerful leadership examples, such as Abraham Lincoln's presidency, John Lewis' nonviolence, and Abby Wambach's teamwork, and recognizing—by studying topics such as civil rights—the difficulties that come when leading in the face of fear.
- partner, group, and ensemble work in math, science, physical education, and the arts, where they take turns in leadership roles and make their mark, whether designing and presenting their own superheroes after studying the hero's journey, removing invasive species to make way for new outdoor trails, or working together to create classroom norms.
- mentorship of younger students through authentic learning experiences, such as rainforest research, Japan projects, read-alouds, building and playing games to benefit KIVA, and mentoring 4th graders in the year-long Tower Project partnership.
- exciting opportunities for identifying and exploring interests as emerging leaders, including those in athletics, theatre productions, student clubs, and 8th grade electives such as Leadership Seminar; and student-generated initiatives including assemblies celebrating resilience and bake sales to support causes.
- week-long 8th grade trip to the nation's capital in spring, then returning to lead the school-wide March to the Memorials service learning project on campus.



Portrait of a USM Leader: Upper School

USM Upper School students learn ...

- leadership is not necessarily position, but mindset and action, and a responsibility of all.
- self-reflection and thoughtful listening are essential for leaders.
- leadership involves a unique degree of accountability, both for oneself and for the outcomes of a group.
- courage, vision, influence, and perseverance are necessary to move communities forward in positive ways.
- ethical leadership is not a destination, but rather a complex journey, shaped by one's interests and values as well as a desire to positively impact a community.

USM Upper School students practice ...

- embodying the values of the Common Trust.
- developing empathetic relationships with self, others, and the community.
- welcoming challenges to pursue growth and seek innovative solutions.
- embracing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.
- collaborating together and navigating productive conflict, inside and outside of the classroom, in ways that honor all members of the community.
- communicating in purposeful and meaningful ways, including listening to understand and giving and receiving feedback.
- conducting research and making informed, strategic, and ethical decisions, considering the broader impact on individuals and the community.

USM Upper School students experience ...

- four-year advising, focused simultaneously on belonging within a community of peers and determining one's individual pathway.
- Community Engagement, a program connecting USM to local issues such as food insecurity, environmental justice, and poverty through study, discussions, panels, and service opportunities.
- Round Table discussions centered around democratic principles, deep listening, critical thinking, and text-based analysis, giving every student four years to discover voice, develop interpretations, marshal evidence, and construct meaning.
- offerings from Public Speaking, which develops communication skills and confidence, to arts classes that necessitate interpersonal skills, empathy, and conflict resolution.
- pedagogies across departments that emphasize collaboration, risk taking, and perseverance.
- abundant opportunities for doing the real work of leadership within student clubs, organizations, committees, affinity groups, student publications, electives, and teams.
- a no-cut athletic program, with its values of inclusivity, teamwork, dedication, and sportsmanship, where all student athletes are challenged to lead from wherever they are, whether that's as a captain, from the bench, or both.
- transcript distinction programs offering authentic leadership and mentorship opportunities within four pathways of learning: innovation, global citizenship, independent science research, and community service.
- a senior year featuring myriad opportunities for students to leave their marks on USM as student leaders, from senior presentations, to Tower Projects and Tower Talks, to Prefects' messages of gratitude at the Senior Send-off.