UNIVERSITY SCHOOL
OF MILWAUKEE



Parent University

Fall 2026

SESSION GUIDEBOOK

UNIVERSITY SCHOOL
OF MILWAUKEE

Our Mission

University School of Milwaukee cultivates excellence in learning, leadership, and citizenship for prekindergarten through 12th grade students. Students are engaged, known, and valued within our passionate independent school community guided by our Common Trust.

The Common Trust

The basic philosophy of community behavior at University School of Milwaukee is the Common Trust, which is expressed in the following pledge:

"We, the members of the University School of Milwaukee community, commit to and practice the Common Trust. We agree to relate to one another and the school with respect, trust, honesty, fairness, and kindness."

Welcome to Parent University



USM is excited to offer its third Parent University. This evening is designed to provide you with an opportunity to learn about a wide range of academic and co-curricular programming at USM, to benefit from the breadth of expertise from USM's employees, and to connect with the community members that make USM such a special place.

Please review the offerings on the following pages and then sign up, using the session registration form, for the experiences that best speak to your current curiosities and priorities.



The sessions are for adults, but we're happy to offer free on-site childcare for USM prekindergarten through 6th grade students; if you'd like to bring them along, please sign them up using this childcare registration form.

After an evening of learning, we invite you to stay for a reception.

We look forward to seeing you there!

Schedule

5–5:25 p.m.	**Childcare Drop-Off, Light Refreshments, and Schedule Pickup**
5:30–6 p.m.	**Block 1**
6:10–6:40 p.m.	**Block 2**
6:50–7:20 p.m.	**Block 3**
7:20–8 p.m.	**Adult Reception and Childcare Pickup**



Parent University

Block 1

5:30-6 p.m.

Chinese Calligraphy: Introduction and Fun Practice

Yongyan Liu, Upper School Mandarin Teacher

Divisions: All

In this session, we will learn what Chinese calligraphy is, explore its history, and discover the five major styles of calligraphy. We'll also have fun trying some calligraphy writing ourselves! No worries if you know nothing about calligraphy—it's designed for beginners, and most importantly, it's going to be fun!

Think Big, Go Global: Japan Lessons Across the Curriculum

Elaine Griffin, Head of Middle School; Lower School, Middle School, and Upper School Faculty

Divisions: All

Learn how USM's Think Big grant system enabled eight USM faculty to bring global learning alive in classrooms across divisions. Hear about how lessons and learning from our Japan trip are being used at various grade levels, in drama, and in art classrooms. Watch out—you may leave wanting to visit the Land of the Rising Sun yourself!

Beyond Trolley Problems: Finding Meaning Asking Questions That Matter

Joe Eason, Head of Upper School

Division: Upper School

History electives at USM challenge students to dig deep into history and the social sciences to get a head start on college-level thinking. Beyond just prepping for a big test, classes like Moral Philosophy and Ethics invite students to think through and engage with challenging texts, putting them in dialogue and discussion with their peers and with authors throughout history. We will consider and then dissect a well-known dilemma. Hopefully, you will leave with more questions than answers.

Ready or Not: What Makes Students Thrive in College?

Liz Jackson, Director of College Guidance; Veronica Hauad, Deputy Director of Admissions, University of Chicago; Alex Pizzol, Assistant Director of Engineering Advising, Cornell University

Division: Upper School

The leap from high school to college is a major milestone and can be challenging, even for students who were very successful in high school! But the habits that make freshmen thrive aren't a mystery. Hear directly from USM's College Guidance office alongside student life and academic professionals from Cornell University and the University of Chicago on what actually separates students who flounder from those who flourish. Walk away knowing exactly which skills to start building now, long before move-in day.

Digital Mental Health Hygiene: Practical Strategies for Parents

Melissa Nelson, Ph.D, LPC and Jenny Strom, LPC of North Shore Center; Elina Kats, Middle School Counselor

Divisions: Middle School and Upper School

For tweens and teens, the digital world isn't just a distraction—it's a powerful mirror shaping who they are. How can parents help them log off without starting a household war? This session moves past the usual "screen-time rules" to equip parents with strategies to foster healthy online behaviors. Learn how to help your child build mindful, intentional digital habits, protect their mental health, and find a healthy balance between the online world and real life.



Parent University

Block 1

5:30-6 p.m.

What Really Builds Strong Middle School Readers and Writers?

Anne Davis, Middle School English Teacher

Division: Middle School

Like any skill, writing is learned. It can seem insurmountable to the middle schooler, until they learn the fundamentals that break it down to manageable steps. Learning to make reading a habit also takes patience and the ability to look for opportunities to build it into daily life. Student choice is critical in this process. Learn how to support your Middle School reader and writer so you all can be on the same "page"!

Carry the One? Not Anymore! Surviving "New" Math in Preschool and Lower School

Laura Blanchet, Lower School Academic Resource Center Math Specialist

Divisions: Preschool and Lower School

Parents and guardians will get a behind-the-scenes look at the strategies students are using in today's math classrooms. We'll explore why math looks different from the way many of us learned it, how these approaches build strong number sense, and how you can support your child at home without the frustration. Come ready to turn those "huh?" moments into confident "aha!" understandings.



Parent University

Block 1

5:30-6 p.m.

Balance Bike vs. Training Wheels

Jennifer Lee and Brooke Bernbeck, Preschool and Lower School Physical Education Teachers

Divisions: Preschool and Lower School

Join us for an informative parent learning session focused on balance bikes and how they support early bike-riding success. During this session, families will learn how balance bikes help children naturally develop coordination, balance, confidence, and independence without relying on training wheels. We will discuss the key differences between balance bikes and traditional training wheels, including how balance-first learning often leads to a smoother and more successful transition to pedal bikes. Parents will also gain tips on proper bike sizing, safety, skill development, and ways to encourage confidence and enjoyment while learning to ride. This session is designed to help families better understand the long-term physical and developmental benefits of balance biking.

Welcome to Preschool! How Emergent Curriculum Grows From PK to JK—Plus Answers to All Your Preschool Questions

Jen Keppler, Assistant Head of Preschool; Lisl Gapinski '92, Junior Kindergarten Teacher; Jennifer Wisniewski, Prekindergarten Teacher

Division: Preschool

Join us for an inside look at the journey from PK to JK and how children's ideas, interests, and questions shape an emergent curriculum throughout the Preschool years. We'll explore what learning looks like across both age groups, how teachers balance child-led inquiry with intentional teaching and academic skills, and how experiences build from year to year. We'll also leave plenty of time to answer your questions and help you better understand the Preschool experience at USM.



Parent University

Block 2

6:10-6:40 p.m.



Creative Writing Workshop

Charlie Housiaux '02, Assistant Head of Upper School

Divisions: All

What can a song make you imagine? In this hands-on creative writing workshop, we'll use music as a springboard for generating images, characters, and conflict. You'll experience some of the strategies our students use to move from an initial spark to a memorable story. This intentionally no-tech writing experience offers a glimpse into the creative work happening in our classrooms and a chance to consider what we gain by giving students space to imagine, create, and tell stories for themselves.

The Many STEM Journeys of Upper School Students

Erin Heaney, Upper School Science Teacher

Divisions: All

There is no single formula for a successful STEM student—only unique pathways tailored to every spark of curiosity. Join us for a deep dive into the Upper School Science department, where students build confidence and master scientific problem-solving from any starting point. Discover how our students engage in real-world exploration using cutting-edge tools like the Anatomage table, advanced data collection technology, rigorous AP coursework, and Independent Science Research. We will also highlight how student research connects directly to the greater Milwaukee community and reaches prestigious global stages like the Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair. Come see how we empower every student to chart their own path to scientific discovery!

Perfect is the Enemy of Good: How to Help Your Child Move Beyond Perfectionism to Resilience

Melissa Nelson, Ph.D, LPC and Jenny Strom, LPC of North Shore Center; Lizzy Perry, Upper School Counselor

Divisions: Middle School and Upper School

When children believe that anything less than perfect is a failure, their mental health takes a heavy toll. This session equips parents with actionable techniques to help children break free from the pressure of impossible standards. Learn how to transform achievement anxiety into healthy motivation, cultivate a growth mindset, and teach your child that "good enough" is often exactly what they need to succeed.

USM Internship and Shadowing Program: Providing Hands-On, Career-Building, Professional Opportunities and Experiences for Our Students

Internship and Shadowing committee members Julie Gilpin, Meredith Epstein, Kara McMahon, and Dr. Sri Lazarro

Divisions: Middle School and Upper School

Did you know that USM students have the opportunity to shadow a doctor for a day, be a paid intern at a local business, learn how a law firm works, hear about different career paths, and have experienced professionals review their resumés and conduct practice interviews? Learn about the USM Internship and Shadowing committee's mission to provide sophomores, juniors, and seniors with exposure to a wide range of fields through job shadowing, internships, and Lunch and Learn panel discussions.

Parent University

Block 2

6:10-6:40 p.m.

Working Memory and Executive Function

Jessica Herrick and Kiranjeet Kaur, Upper School English Teachers

Divisions: Middle School and Upper School

Ever wonder why some information sticks and some slides right out of your student's brain? The answer lies in how we take in, process, and store information—and working memory is often the hidden gatekeeper. Explore the science behind how learning actually happens, and walk away with concrete strategies to help your student's brain work with them, not against them.

Thinking Like a Mathematician: Middle School Math at USM

Jason Strains, Middle School Math Teacher

Division: Middle School

What does it mean to be successful in mathematics? In this session, we'll explore the philosophy behind USM's Middle School math program and how we balance strong foundational skills and fluency with problem-solving, reasoning, and deeper mathematical thinking. We'll look at how students are challenged at different levels, why there can be multiple valuable approaches to the same mathematics, and how we help students grow as confident and capable mathematicians. We'll also explore USM's mathematics pathways and how these priorities inform thoughtful decisions about course placement as students transition to Upper School.

Optimize Feedback From the Middle School Report Card

Brad Dunning, Assistant Head of Middle School

Division: Middle School

You've downloaded your child's Middle School report card and reviewed the feedback. Now what? This session is designed to help students and parents analyze and optimize teacher feedback given on the Middle School's standards-driven report card. Learn how to have productive conversations with your children that encourage self-advocacy and growth.

Navigating the Path to College: A Guide for Parents of (Maybe Distant!) Future Applicants

Liz Jackson, Director of College Guidance

Divisions: Lower School and Middle School

Even if the college application process is years away for your family, learn about trends and changes in higher education admissions. You'll leave with an understanding of what colleges are evaluating when they read applications, how colleges are addressing access and affordability, and what matters for admissions (as well as what doesn't!), so you can prepare for when your children begin navigating the process in Upper School.

Beyond the School Day: Exploring Enrichment Opportunities at USM

Sabrina Raber, Director of Auxiliary Programs; Chris Malicky, Associate Director of Auxiliary Programs

Divisions: Preschool, Lower School, and Middle School

Discover the many ways students can learn, create, play, and grow beyond the classroom. This session will provide an overview of USM's after-school programs, specialty classes, private lessons, extended care options, and no-school day camps. Learn how these programs support student development, build new skills, and help families make the most of their time at USM.



Parent University

Block 2

6:10-6:40 p.m.

Building Confidence and Attention: Home Routines That Help Kids Thrive

Gina Bongiorno, Assistant Head of Lower School; Kelley Sovol, Lower School Teacher

Divisions: Preschool and Lower School

Screens, schedules, chores, and all that "boring" time in between—what's actually shaping your child's day? We'll take a close look at how technology, free play, chores, boredom, and extracurriculars each play a role in childhood development, often in surprising ways. Walk away with small, practical shifts that fit your family life without any overhaul required—just simple changes that help kids thrive.

Growing Math-Happy Kids: How to Have Mathematical Fun at Home with Your Preschool or Lower School Student

Amy Hand, Associate Head of School

Divisions: Preschool and Lower School

Everyone knows they should read to their kids at home, but what about doing math? There is a world of engaging mathematics (beyond arithmetic!) that you can explore at home with your child, through games, puzzles, and plain old chit-chat. By modeling curiosity, wonderment, and problem-solving, you'll have fun with your child and teach them to see math as something fun.



Parent University

Block 3

6:50-7:20 p.m.

Canvas 101: Parent Support With the Basics

Brad Dunning, Assistant Head of Middle School; Charlie Housiaux '02, Assistant Head of Upper School; Jen Keppler, Assistant Head of Preschool

Divisions: All

Canvas is USM's new learning management system. We want to support parents through this change. Are you getting too many notifications? Need help with the app? Not sure how to view your child's gradebook? We're here to walk you through these basics and to answer any questions you have. To get the most out of this session, download the Canvas Parent app from Instructure on your phone ahead of time, and/or bring a laptop if that's how you prefer to access Canvas.

From the Midwest to the World: How Language Creates Opportunities for Life

Lower School, Middle School, and Upper School World Language Faculty

Divisions: All

We will discuss the importance of language learning, the value of having intercultural competency, and the benefits beyond school walls of having a second or third language. We will also highlight the power of immersive language experiences through traveling abroad.

In-House Academic Help: USM's Built-In Support Structures for All Students

Amy Hand, Associate Head of School

Divisions: All

USM aims to be a one-stop shop for students and their academic needs. Learn about the resources available for all students, in and outside of class, across divisions. Hear an educator's perspective on how students can learn self-advocacy skills by availing themselves of these options, and why it's great for students to utilize USM's resources before pursuing external help.

USM Legends, Lore, Traditions, and More!

Will Piper '96, Assistant Director of Alumni Relations and Reunion Giving

Divisions: All

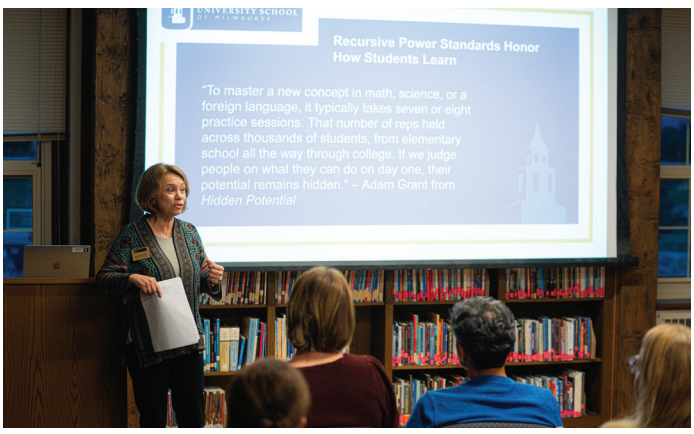
Learn about some of USM's most enduring traditions and history, as well as the origins of several artifacts that are on display throughout campus. How did USM get the colors of blue, gold, and white? Why are the Upper School houses named what they are? Who is that gentleman in the giant Von Maur painting across from Harvey B. Sperling Hall? What's the story behind the victory bell? Learn the answers to these questions and more as you explore how USM's history helped shape the school we know and love today.

From Bookshelf to Round Table: Upper School Text Selection

Dani Goldstein, Sarah Foust Vinson, and Drew Mullen, Upper School English Teachers; Laura Klein, Upper School Librarian

Division: Upper School

There are so many great books out in the world! How do these books reflect and expand students' experiences? How do books help teach reading, writing, and communication skills? And how do we get students to even read? Join Upper School English teachers as they take you through the process of selecting novels and our Upper School librarian as she shares strategies for cultivating readers.



6:50-7:20 p.m.



The College Application Process and USM's College Guidance Office

Liz Jackson, Director of College Guidance and Upper School History Teacher; Brian Hendricks, Associate Director of College Guidance; Aaron Swartz; Associate Director of College Guidance

Division: Upper School

Learn how to best approach the college search and application process for your Upper School student. From what's most important during freshman year to how our counselors help students select their college essay topics, you will come away with a stronger understanding of what the college admissions process looks like and how USM supports students and families through it.



Parent University

Block 3

6:50-7:20 p.m.

Healthy Body, Healthy Mind

Kristi Hall, Middle School Physical Education Teacher

Division: Middle School

What if the secret to a sharper, calmer student wasn't more study time, but more movement? Physical activity and intentional movement throughout the school day do more than boost fitness—they fuel focus, mood, and long-term health. Discover the science behind why bodies in motion make for minds that are ready to learn, and the simple ways movement can be built into every school day.

Middle School Developmental Milestones

Melissa Beihoff, Nicola De Torre, and Emily Vruwink '04, Middle School Teachers

Division: Middle School

USM's Middle School grade-level coordinators will guide attendees through the key developmental milestones and academic expectations for each grade. They will highlight the cognitive, social, and emotional growth students typically experience, offering insights into how caregivers can support their child's progress and development throughout the Middle School years.

Standards-Driven Grading: For Lower School Parents Preparing for Middle School

Elaine Griffin, Head of Middle School; Michael Tauscher, Head of Preschool and Lower School

Division: Lower School

Learn about the Middle School's assessment practices and report cards as you prepare your child for the transition to Middle School. We are excited to share a data-driven approach to grading practices, as well as the ways that teachers are promoting learning attributes among Middle School students.

How Children Learn to Read: The Science, the Stages, and How to Support Them at Home

Sarah Dugan, Lower School Academic Resource Center Literacy Specialist

Divisions: Preschool and Lower School *(through 1st grade)*

Learning to read is a complex process, and parents play an important role in helping children build the foundations for lifelong literacy. We will take a look at what the research tells us about the how children learn to read, the key stages of early reading development, and what this process can look like in everyday life. Most importantly, we will focus on what you can do at home. You'll come away with simple, meaningful ways to enrich your child's experiences and confidently support them on their journey to becoming successful and enthusiastic readers.

Reception

Following the Block 3 sessions, join us for an adults-only reception!

Enjoy mocktails and hors d'oeuvres, and connect with other parents and caregivers.

- 7:20–8 p.m.
- Harvey B. Sperling Hall (located adjacent to the Middle School lobby)
- Childcare will continue through the end of the reception *(for those who have registered)*